NATION

Meghalaya: BSF DIG attacked

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Markets lose for 2nd day amid high crude prices

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

India now eye title triumph in Women's WC Qualifiers

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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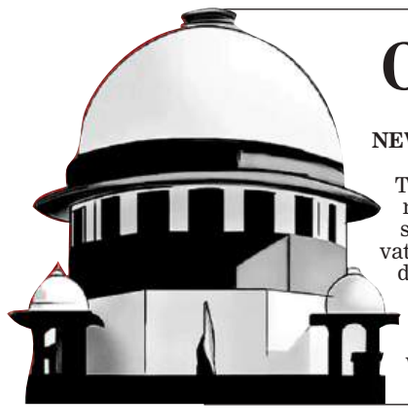
سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 13 MARCH 2026 | FRIDAY | BENGALURU | 23 RAMADAN, 1447 H | Vol 5 | Issue No 63 | Pages: 8

OBC 'creamy layer' can't be decided by income alone: SC



NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

The Supreme Court has ruled that 'creamy layer' status for providing reservation to OBCs cannot be decided solely on the basis of parental income and that treating similarly placed employees of private entities and PSUs differently from government employees, for deciding reservation, would amount to hostile discrimination.

A bench of justices PS Narasimha and R Mahadevan dismissed the appeals filed by the Centre while upholding the decisions of the high courts of Delhi, Madras and Kerala which dealt with the eligibility of candidates claiming OBC (Non-Creamy Layer) benefit for civil services examinations. The court said mere determination of the status of a candidate as to whether he/she falls within the creamy layer or the non-creamy layer of the OBCs cannot be decided solely on the basis of income.

The court said that while caste may be an indicator of historical disadvantage, it also cannot be treated as the sole determinant of backwardness.

"The exclusion of the creamy layer among the backward classes is not a matter of mere policy preference but a constitutional imperative intended to ensure that the benefits of reservation reach those who are socially and educationally backward. The principle seeks to prevent relatively advanced segments within the backward classes from siphoning off the advantages of affirmative action, so that the objective of the constitutional scheme of affirmative action, of which reservation is a reflection, are adhered to," it said. *— PTI*

2 oil tankers cross Hormuz to reach India

The tankers 'went dark' to avoid detection; Delhi in talks with Iran for passage of Indian ships

Liberia-flagged tanker Shenlong Suezmax, carrying crude oil from Saudi Arabia, dcoked at Mumbai Port on Thursday *—PTI*

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

A foreign-flagged crude oil tanker carrying about one million barrels of Saudi Arabian crude has reached Mumbai Port after passing through the Strait of Hormuz amid the ongoing Iran-US war, offering some relief to India's strained energy supplies.

This is the first crude oil tankers to reach India after passing through the Strait of Hormuz since the war began.

Iran has closed of Hormuz . This was a day after, the Mayuree Naree, a Thai-flagged bulk carrier, was struck by Iran in Hormuz while en route from the UAE to Kandla Port in Gujarat, India.

Meanwhilee, The Liberia-flagged Shenlong Suezmax docked at Mumbai Port at 1pm on Wednesday. The tanker had begun loading crude from Saudi Arabia's Ras Tanura port on 1 March and departed on 3 March. Carrying about 1,35,335 tonnes of crude, the vessel was tracked in the Strait of Hormuz on 8 March before it briefly went off tracking systems.

According to reports, the tanker switched off its Automatic Identification System (AIS) transponder while navigating via Hormuz, a tactic known as "going dark" often used by ships to avoid being tracked. The vessel reappeared on tracking systems on 9 March and later reached Mumbai. Industry sources said the ship has begun discharging its oil.

Another tanker — an Indian-flagged very large crude carrier carrying about 2 million barrels of Iraqi crude — has entered Indian waters and is headed to Paradip in Odisha, where Indian Oil Corporation operates a refinery.

The development comes amid reports that Iran has allowed Indian ships to pass through the strait, although Tehran denied the claim.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal declined to confirm or deny the reports, saying External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Iran's foreign minister had discussed shipping safety.

India is also in touch with Iran to secure safe passage for around 28 Indian merchant vessels in the region. Officials said 24 vessels with 677 Indian seafarers are west of the strait, while four vessels carrying 101 Indians are stationed to its east. Hormuz carries about 20 per cent of global oil and more than half of India's crude imports, as well as large volumes of LPG and LNG. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 2, 4 & 7

Iran's new Supreme Leader vows to keep Hormuz shut

DUBAI, 12 MARCH

Iran's new Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei on Thursday vowed that Tehran would continue attacks on Gulf neighbours and use the effective closure of the strategic Strait of Hormuz as leverage against the US and Israel.

In his first statement since succeeding his late father, the 56-year-old leader did not appear on camera. His message was instead read by a state television news anchor.

Israel suspects Khamenei was wounded in the opening phase of the war. He has not been seen in public since the conflict began. The statement pledged to avenge those killed in the war, including victims of a strike on a school that reportedly killed more than 165 people.

Khamenei's remarks signalled Iran's willingness to continue the conflict, which has disrupted global energy supplies. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

Will the US impose more tariffs on India & China?

The Donald Trump administration in the United States has launched new "unfair trade practice" investigations against 16 key trading partners, including India, China and Bangladesh, in a move to restore tariff pressure after they were struck down by the US Supreme Court as illegal last month.

The probes are being conducted under "Section 301" of the Trade Act of 1974, which empowers the US Trade Representative to impose tariffs against trading partners employing unfair trade practices.

The investigation could lead to new tariffs against China, the European Union, India, Japan, South Korea and Mexico by this summer, US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said.

*p**>>>More on Page 5***

INDIAN KILLED AS IRAN ATTACKS OIL TANKER WITH UNDERWATER DRONE

NEW YORK, 12 MARCH

An Indian national has reportedly been killed in an attack carried out by Iran using a underwater drone also known as "suicide boat" against a US-owned oil tanker near Iraq, sources said.

The tanker, Safesea Vishnu, sailing under the flag of the Marshall Islands, was attacked on Wednesday off Khor Al Zubair port within Iraq's territorial waters.

Sources told PTI that one Indian crew member was killed in the attack. The remaining 27 crew and personnel on board were rescued and taken to Basra.

Sources close to Safesea, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the company was devastated by the loss of the Indian national.

They also expressed concern that Indians account for over 15 per cent of the world's seafarers, meaning that regardless of which vessels Iran targets, Indian nationals could become "collateral damage".

According to vessel-tracking website Vessel Finder, the Safesea Vishnu is a crude oil tanker built in 2007. The vessel is 228.6 metres long and 32.57 metres wide, with a gross tonnage of 42,010 and a deadweight tonnage of 73,976. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

K'taka may see power crisis soon

BENGALURU, 12 MARCH

Power generation in Karnataka may face disruptions after the Centre prioritised natural gas allocation to other sectors amid nationwide shortages triggered by Israel–Iran war.

According to a notification issued on Tuesday, the Centre has invoked powers under the Natural Gas (Supply Regulation) Order, 2026, to prioritise sectors for natural gas supply following disruptions in LPG availability.

Under the new order, domestic consumption has been given the highest priority, followed by sectors such as transport and fertiliser production. Power generation has been placed at the lowest priority, raising concerns about supply to gas-based power plants.

Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) has already stopped gas supply to the 370 MW Yelahanka gas-based power plant from 6 am on 12 March. The Yelahanka plant, operated by Karnataka Power Corporation Limited (KPCL), is the State's only gas-based power generation facility. Any prolonged disruption in gas supply could affect its electricity output. The unit, which primarily supplies power to Bengaluru, has been operating continuously since December to help meet rising demand.

Karnataka's daily electricity requirement is currently about 355 million units. *—ANI*

Workers unload domestic LPG cylinders from a truck at a gas agency in Bengaluru on Thursday, as panic buying spreads across the country amid concerns over cooking gas supplies following the Iran war *—MOHAMMED ASAD*

GOVT SAYS NO FUEL SHORTAGE; KEROSENE, COAL MAKE A COMEBACK

The government told Parliament on Thursday that there was no shortage of petrol, diesel and kerosene due to the West Asia war and it was not the time for rumour-mongering. This comes even as people queued up at petrol stations and domestic LPG outlets amid panic buying over a perceived paucity of fuel.

Meanwhile, India has temporarily reintroduced kerosene for household use and coal for hotels and restaurants. The government has allocated 48,000 kilolitres of kerosene to states on top of the regular quota of 1 lakh kl.

It also asked environmental bodies to permit the use of biomass, RDF pellets and coal as alternate fuel for one month.

India gets half of its crude oil via the now shut Strait of Hormuz, it also gets 55 per cent of cooking gas LPG and 30 per cent liquefied natural gas (LNG) from there.

The government also said that commercial LPG cylinders will be released and state governments will identify the beneficiaries.

Delhi was declared the first kerosene-free city in India on 17 June, 2014. The initiative, launched in 2012, replaced kerosene usage with LPG to reduce pollution. *—PTI*

Govt 'bartered' India's oil rights to US: Rahul

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Thursday alleged in the Lok Sabha that India's energy security has been "compromised" due to a "flawed" foreign policy. He claimed the government had "bartered" to the US the right to determine India's relationships with oil suppliers.

Gandhi said the war involving the US, Israel and Iran would have far-reaching conse-quences for India.

He warned that the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which about 20 per cent of global oil flow, could severely affect India. "The pain has just started, restaurants are closing, there is widespread panic about LPG and street vendors are affected. This is only the beginning," he said. "Allowing the US to decide who we buy oil and gas from — whether we buy oil from Rus-sia or not — means the right to determine our relationships with different oil suppliers has been bartered," he said.

Referring to reports of the US granting India a 30-day waiver to buy Russian oil, he said it was "puzzling" that a country of India's size would need permission from a nation.

LoP in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi with other MPs during the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Thursday*—PTI*

He linkED the issue to disclosures by the US Department of Justice, re-ferring to Petroleum Minister Hardeep Puri and his connection to late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Meanwhile, Puri informed the Parliament that there is no LPG crisis. "India sources crude from 40 countries, against 27 in 2006-07. This... has given us options that other nations now find themselves without. Refineries are operating at high-capacity utilisa-tion; in several cases, they are exceeding 100 per cent," he said. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Class 1 student falls through school bus floor, run over

AGRA, 12 MARCH

A Class 1 student of a private school here died after she fell through the broken floor of a moving school bus and was run over by its rear wheels in Agra district, police said on Thursday. This is a second incident in less than a month. The incident occurred around 3 pm on Wednesday when a bus of RBS School was dropping children at their homes. DCP (West) Aditya said the accident took place in the Etmadpur police station area when the floor of the bus suddenly gave way. The girl, Naina, fell through the damaged portion of the floor onto the road and was run over by the vehicle's rear wheels, he said. On 28 February, an 8-year-old schoolgirl named Ananya was crushed to death after falling through a broken iron sheet on the floor of a school bus in Aligarh. *—PTI*

TUMAKURU HORROR

Wife, lover kill her husband 3 months after marriage

TUMAKURU, 12 MARCH

Police arrested four people, including a woman and her alleged lover on Thursday, for the murder of her husband just three months after their marriage in Tiptur in Tumakuru.

The accused woman, Farzana, 31, allegedly conspired with her lover Dhanraj, 24, and two others to kill her husband, scrap trader Mansoor Pasha. The other accused are Venkatesh, 24, and Darshan, 24.

Mansoor had married Farzana in January in a family-arranged match. On 4 March, he left home after receiving a call informing him that scrap materials were available for collection. When he did not return, his family began searching for him. His body was later found in a farm in Tiptur.

A case was registered at the Tiptur Rural Police Station. During the probe, Farzana's role was uncoevered.

Police said Farzana was in a relationship with Dhanraj, a catering worker, for seven months. She had previously been married, but her first husband had died due to illness.

Police said Farzana met Dhanraj through Venkatesh, who was in a relationship with her sister. The two later developed an affair and spent considerable time together in Chikkamagaluru. They were caught together near Tiptur railway station, following which Farzana's family arranged her marriage with Mansoor. However, police said Farzana remained in contact with Dhanraj after the wedding and the two conspired to kill Mansoor.

On 4 March, Darshan called Mansoor to a location on the pretext of collecting scrap. When he arrived, the group attacked and killed him before fleeing the spot. *—Salar News*

Kodagu sees 3rd death due to tusker attack in 2 weeks

KODAGU, 12 MARCH

Kodagu on Thursday reported its third death in two weeks from an elephant attack. Coffee grower Ganapathi, 49, was killed when a wild tusker attacked him as he was heading to his estate near High School Paisari, close to Siddapur in Virajpet taluk. The elephant reportedly emerged from within a coffee plantation and charged at him. The series of fatal encounters has left residents across Kodagu living in fear, with elephants frequently straying into coffee plantations and roadside areas. On 28 February, a PUC student, Poojya, was killed in Bettathur in Guddegadu village of Madikeri. Ten days later, another woman was killed in in Kushalnagar. *—Salar News*

Mandya court evacuated after bomb threat

MANDYA, 12 MARCH

The Mandya district court was evacuated following a bomb threat received via email, police said. The threat was sent to the district judge's email, prompting immediate police, bomb squad, and fire brigade response. Court proceedings were halted, and everyone evacuated as a precaution. This was the second such threat, with a similar email received on 16 February. A lawyer expressed concern about the repeated threats and urged Mandya police to identify those responsible. Further details are awaited as police continue their investigation. Meanwhile, similar threats in Mumbai led to evacuations at BSE, Vidhan Bhawan, and High Court, with police assuring enhanced security measures. More updates are pending —*Salar News*

School girl jumps to death over harassment

BIDAR, 12 MARCH

A Class 10 girl allegedly died by suicide after jumping from the third floor of a government school in Bhemalkhed village, Bidar district, on Wednesday. The incident occurred during the morning assembly when she climbed unnoticed and jumped. She has been identified as 15-year-old Madiha Naseer Pasha, a student at Government Adarsha Vidyalaya. Despite treatment, she died from her injuries. Her father, Naseer Pasha, said, "My daughter was harassed by a boy in her class who forced her to love him. Despite warnings in a village panchayat, harassment persisted, causing her mental distress. The boy is responsible, and I request strict action." A case has been registered at Bemalakheda police station. —*SALAR NEWS*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support

Boy kills classmate over teasing in Ballari

BALLARI, 12 MARCH

Alleged harassment and social exclusion by classmates is suspected to have driven a hostel student to attack fellow students at Gurukul International School in Ballari last Saturday, leaving one student dead and seven others seriously injured. The minor responsible was detained on Monday in Rupanagudi, Srirampur Colony. Ballari Deputy Superintendent of Police Govindraj said the boy revealed during counselling that he was repeatedly teased by classmates from Andhra Pradesh for being a "Kannadiga" and was excluded from games and discussions. Angered after overhearing plans to rag him, he allegedly attacked them with a rod. —*SALAR NEWS*

Passenger held at KIA with Rs 1.4 cr hydroponic ganja

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

A passenger was held with hydroponic ganja worth Rs 1.4 crore at the Kempegowda International Airport here on his arrival from Malaysia on Thursday, officials said. The accused, whose identity has not been disclosed by the customs officials, was arrested under the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, they said. "Bengaluru Customs intercepted a passenger arriving from Malaysia and seized 4 kg of hydroponic ganja, valued at Rs 1.4 crore," Custom officials said in a post on X. —*PTI*

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'Indira Canteens may shut due to LPG crisis'

Urban poor may lose out; distillery closes

Indira Canteens that serve food priced at Rs 5 to Rs 10 are likely to suffer ; people scramble to grab LPG gas cylinders throughout Bengaluru

–WIKIPEDIA/MOHAMMED ASAD

BENGALURU, 12 MARCH

The LPG supply scarcity in Karnataka has led to apprehension about the continuity of the Indira Canteens in the City, sources in the municipal body said on Thursday.

Indira Canteens are the Congress government's flagship initiatives which were started by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah during his previous stint from 2013 to 2018. There are about 180 Indira canteens in the City, which were built to feed the urban poor at a highly subsidised price. They offer breakfast at Rs 5 and meals for Rs 10.

The vendors of the Indira Canteen told the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) officials that their services may be affected if the LPG crisis caused by the Isael-US-Iran war continues in the State, GBA sources said.

"We wrote to the Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs department asking them to restore it. Today also we raised the issue with the government," a GBA official said. He said many urban poor depend on the canteens.

RUM DISTILLERY SHUTS

India's first premium craft rum made from jaggery has temporarily shut its operations after failing to procure gas for its boilers, Aruna Urs said.

Urs, the founder of the distillery that produces Huli Spirits said on X: "We had a public and a private supplier, and both managers categorically stated that the order from above is to only refill domestic canisters." Urs did not mention how long the shutdown would continue.

The premium, single-origin jaggery-based rum is produced at a micro-distillery located in Nanjangud taluk of Mysuru

Will discuss LPG shortage during Cabinet meeting: DKS

> They should find a solution today itself and supply LPG. Otherwise, if gas is not available in the villages, then our farmers will have to use firewood as an alternative. They say people should not use firewood and declare things as 'firewood-free,' but people are compelled to make such decisions
>
> -DK Shivakumar, Deputy Chief Minister

MOHAMMED ASAD

BENGALURU, 12 MARCH

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Thursday said the government will take up the issue of LPG shortage in the Cabinet meeting later in the day, while urging the Centre to immediately address supply disruptions that are affecting households and farmers.

Shivakumar told press the shortage of LPG supply was causing hardship to the public, particularly in rural areas, and insisted that the matter needed urgent attention at the highest level.

"The (BJP) MPs are not speaking about it," he said.

Shivakumar said the Centre must act immediately to resolve the problem.

"They should find a solution today itself and supply LPG. Otherwise, if gas is not available in the villages, then our farmers will have to use firewood as an alternative. They say people should not use firewood and declare things as 'firewood-free,' but people are compelled to make such decisions," he said.

He also criticised the Union government over rising LPG prices. "The Central government is not reducing gas prices. Petrol and diesel prices (international level) are increasing, and the prices of all commodities are rising. People are struggling. So the Centre itself must respond to this. The State government alone cannot bring about this change." —*PTI*

Kolar faces difficulty booking LPG cylinders

KOLAR, 12 MARCH

Consumers are rushing to the LPG dealers with empty cylinders but are made to return empty handed as bookings are not being taken manually, said Aslam Pasha a resident of Gowripet in Kolar. But authorities say that consumers are panicking over the shortage.

With Ugadi around the corner and Ramadan ongoing, people are unwilling to take a chance amid the fuel shortage.

Prasad, a driver residing in Kurubarapet, said he has been trying to book a cylinder online, but was finding it difficult. Even the cylinder delivery boys are "not reachable," he said. He added that his two children are going to write their PUC and SSLC exams and the family is finding it difficult to provide them proper food during the crucial time. Prasad said even eateries in his area are shut due to the shortage of gas.

Kolar Deputy Commissioner Ravi MR conducted a review meeting on Thursday to assess the stock of cylinders, a source said. The district has stock to last for one week, the meeting was informed.

There are about 35 gas dealers in Kolar district and authorities insist that the supply chain is normal. An official connected with the Food and Civil Supplies Department said that while the booking calls would typically be in the hundreds, currently calls are running into thousands. "As such the IVRS lines are getting hanged causing inconvenience to consumers". —*Salar News*

Food being cooked with firewood at the Government Fishery Department run hotel, at Cubbon Park in Bengaluru, on Thursday

–MOHAMMED ASAD

Khandre warns against illegal tree felling amid gas shortage

Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre on Thursday directed officials to remain vigilant to prevent illegal tree felling in forests, areas bordering them, and government lands in the wake of increased demand for firewood due to LPG scarcity. In written instructions issued to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Head of the Forest Force, Meenakshi Negi, Khandre ordered officials to intensify patrols and surveillance to prevent illegal tree felling for firewood. The minister warned that if illegal tree felling occurs in forests or government land, the concerned range officer and staff would be held responsible.

HEATED ASSEMBLY SESSION

Reform KPSC exams, says BJP

BENGALURU, 12 MARCH

BJP members on Thursday raised concerns in the Legislative Assembly over the functioning of the KPSC, alleging irregularities in recruitment examinations and demanding comprehensive reforms to restore credibility to the institution.

Initiating the discussion, Karakala BJP MLA **V Sunil Kumar** said recent Karnataka

Public Service Commission (KPSC) examinations had triggered an "atmosphere of anxiety" . He noted that with nearly 2.75 lakh government posts lying vacant and youth across Karnataka were protesting. He alleged that controversies had eroded public confidence.

Rajajinagar BJP MLA S Suresh Kumar called for structural reforms, including the creation of a permanent evaluation board and a comprehensive overhaul of the examination system to ensure transparency and restore confidence. —*PTI*

'Less forest, but more animals now'

BENGALURU, 12 MARCH

There is an increase in the population of wild animals like tigers and elephants but a decrease in forest cover in the State, Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre told the Legislative Assembly on Thursday. He said this was contributing to the increased human-animal conflicts.

"In 1972, Bandipur had 12 tigers. Now, there are 175 tigers. Regarding the carrying capacity (at Bandipur), we have formed a team of experts and will be getting a report from them," Khandre said.

Khandre was responding to questions raised by MLAs, including LoP R Ashoka in the Assembly who asked if the government's recent decision to halt safaris had decreased human-animal conflict.

In November 2025, the government stopped safaris at Bandipur and Nagarhole tiger reserves following a spate of tiger attacks. However, in February, the government decided to lift the safari ban.

Responding to another question by Malavalli Congress MLA PM Narendraswamy, the Minister said that elephant attacks are also on the rise.

"There are several reasons for this. The elephant population has increased. The elephant corridor has been fragmented due to various developmental works like expressways," he said. —*PTI*

HEALTH MINISTER IS HEALTHY, BUT DEPT SICK: ASHOKA

BENGALURU, 12 MARCH

The BJP claimed there was a "medical emergency" in the State and targeted Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao in the Legislative Assembly on Thursday.

"The Health Minister is healthy, but his department is sick. The Minister can get medicines from anywhere privately, but the poor are not getting medicines. Doctors had called for a strike, but they have temporarily called it off after some negotiations," Leader of Opposition R Ashoka said. "I have with me a list of 270 primary health centres (PHC) that the government is preparing to shut There is worry in those villages as there are no medicines or doctors".

Quoting the government Doctors' Association, Ashoka said patients are not receiving medicines on time due to supply failures recently. The BJP sought to press for discussion under the adjournment motion, but it was decided to discuss it later. —*PTI*

Govt mulls increasing ration card income limit

BENGALURU, 12 MARCH

The State government on Thursday indicated that it may hike the family income limit to obtain a Priority Households (PHH) ration card, considering rising costs.

Health & Family Welfare Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao gave this indication in the Legislative Assembly, while replying to a question raised by senior BJP MLA CN Ashwath Narayan, during question hour on behalf of Food and Civil Supplies Minister KH Muniyappa.

"The current family annual income limit of Rs 1.20 lakh was fixed in 2017, it should certainly be accepted that the amount is less. From 2017, we are now in 2026. There is a need to revise this. It must be re-examined," said Rao, who previously served as food and civil supplies minister.

Noting that the Karnataka Administrative Reforms Commission, headed by senior Congress MLA RV Deshpande, has recommended increasing the income limit to Rs 3 lakh, he said, "The department will look into this."

Raising the issue, Narayan stressed the need for higher income limits as the cost of living in Bengaluru had risen.

Replying to Narayan's statement that 50 per cent of the urban population should get PHH or Antyodaya cards, citing the Food Security Act, the minister said the act meant for the country as a whole, while it varies for states.

Karnataka has 1.24 crore households with PHH ration cards, Rao said. "The Centre has identified 1.09 crore eligible families in Karnataka. But the State has exceeded this by 15.8 lakh families. In some rural areas, 95 per cent of the population is covered." —*PTI*

2 minors among 8 held for City bizman's murder

BENGALURU, 12 MARCH

Eight people, including two minors, have been detained in connection with the kidnapping and murder of real estate businessman Gopal alias Gopi on City's outskirts, police announced. Gopal, in his late 30s and from Honnakalasapura village in Anekal taluk, was involved in real estate and financial activities.

Police previously arrested Mohan Babu, believed to be the main conspirator, who thought Gopal had performed black magic to sabotage his business. "We have nabbed eight people in connection with the kidnapping and murder of Gopal from their hideout in Krishnagiri (Tamil Nadu). Efforts are being made to nab other accomplices," a senior officer said. Gopal and his friend Satish were travelling from Attibele when their car was stopped by assailants near Karpur Gate, who rammed the vehicle and kidnapped Gopal after spraying a substance on him.

Satish managed to alert Gopal's family, who contacted police. The case is under investigation by the CID. Gopal's body was found in Hosur, Tamil Nadu. —*PTI*

Domestic help loots employee of 25 yrs, held for theft

BENGALURU, 12 MARCH

A 55-year-old domestic helper was detained for allegedly stealing gold jewellery and cash worth Rs 16 lakh from an elderly couple's house in Frazer Town, police said.

The accused, Dhanlakshmi, had been working at the residence for nearly 25 years.

The theft came to light on 19 February after a complaint was filed at the Pulakeshinagar police station.

She allegedly stole cash and two gold chains weighing 54 grams since 2025. Police recovered 54 grams of gold jewellery and Rs 8 lakh in cash from her house on 7 March. —*PTI*

WITH INFY CO-FOUNDER

Govt panel to make framework on responsible AI use

BENGALURU, 12 MARCH

The Karnataka government said on Thursday that it has constituted a committee on responsible AI to develop a comprehensive framework to guide the safe, ethical and transparent adoption of AI across government systems.

The committee, chaired by Kris Gopalakrishnan, co-founder of Infosys, and co-chaired by N Manjula, Secretary, Department of Electronics, IT, Biotechnology and Science & Technology, brings together leading experts, it said.

Officials said that the committee will submit an interim report within 60 days and a final set of recommendations within 90 days, outlining a policy framework, risk classification system and implementation roadmap for responsible AI adoption across government.

The members discussed key areas that the committee will focus on while developing the framework.

These areas are establishing responsible AI principles and policy guidelines for the State, and developing a risk classification framework for AI systems used in governance.

Officials said the committee would also focus on identifying AI practices that should be prohibited or restricted, including social scoring of citizens, unlawful or disproportionate surveillance, and automated decision-making. —*PTI*

No MP enjoys privilege in LS, says Birla

Would act against those damaging House's decorum, he says after no-trust motion win

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

Speaker Om Birla on Thursday said Lok Sabha functions strictly according to rules and no member has the privilege to speak whenever he or she wishes

He warned that if anyone behaves contrary to the decorum of the House, he would be compelled to take strict action to preserve its dignity.

A day after a resolution seeking his removal from office was defeated, Birla also said in Lok Sabha that members may personally agree or disagree with the decision of the Chair, but it remains his duty to enforce the rules, procedures and traditions of the House.

He said the Chair does not belong to any individual, it is a symbol of India's democratic traditions, the spirit of the Constitution, and the prestige of this great institution.

The Leader of the House (Prime Minister), the Leader of the Opposition or any other member can speak only by following the procedures laid down in the rules of the House.

Birla came to the House for the first time on Thursday to conduct the proceedings since the notice of no confidence was given against him by the Opposition on during the Budget session.

Birla said MPs always must remember that there is a clear line between democratic discourse and disorder.

Referring to remarks on the Leader of the Opposition being disallowed to table a magazine article based on the unpublished memoir on the India-China conflict of 2020, Birla cited rulings by past speakers when members were not allowed to table documents by the Chair.

Birla said he has always maintained cordial personal relations with members across party lines and never wishes for any action to be taken against any member.

He added that whenever disciplinary action becomes necessary to maintain order in the House, "it causes me deep sadness".

Birla said he has always held the highest respect for all women members in the Lok Sabha. —*PTI*

Opposition party MPs stage a protest in the Parliament over LPG shortage in New Delhi —*PTI*

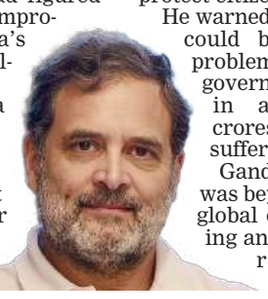
> When Russia, America and China together boycott India, or even attack India, Rahul's heart will feel satisfied because George Soros' agenda of breaking India would have succeeded.
>
>
>
> -Nishikant Dubey, BJP Leader

BIRLA STOPS RAHUL'S SPEECH AS LOP LINKS PURI TO EPSTEIN

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi's speech in the Lok Sabha on Thursday was cut short after he linked Petroleum Minister Hardeep Puri to the "Epstein files", triggering objections and intervention by Speaker Om Birla.

Gandhi was raising concerns over a possible LPG crisis amid the West Asia situation and said he had figured out the "puzzle of compromise" behind India's energy security challenges.



Speaker Birla asked him to confine his remarks to the notice he had submitted and not deviate to other issues. When Gandhi persisted, Birla said allegations could not be made against a Member of Parliament without prior notice and asked him to stick to the subject.

Later speaking to reporters in the Parliament House complex, Gandhi alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was "unable to function" effectively because he was "trapped", but said the government must still ensure India's energy security and protect citizens.

He warned that gas and fuel could become a major problem and urged the government to prepare in advance, saying crores of people could suffer otherwise.

Gandhi said the issue was beyond Iran and the global order was changing and India needed to rethink its approach. —*PTI*

Bomb threat email sends Mumbai into a tizzy

MUMBAI, 12 MARCH

An email threatening "missile and bomb attacks" on key buildings in Mumbai, including Vidhan Bhavan, triggered a security alert on Thursday, prompting extensive searches in the legislature complex. The email, received at 6.57 am on an official legislature account, also mentioned the Bombay Stock Exchange, Bombay High Court, Mumbai Metro and a bank, Legislative Council Chairman Ram Shinde said. Minister of State for Home (Urban) Yogesh Kadam said security agencies were tracing the sender but cautioned against linking the threat to the ongoing West Asia conflict. He said Vidhan Bhavan, where the Budget session is underway, remains secure. Congress Legislature Party leader Vijay Wadettiwar demanded a thorough probe, raising concerns over intelligence preparedness.—*PTI*

—*ANI*

Shahrukh Pathan denied bail in Delhi riots case

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

Sharukh Pathan, accused of pointing a gun at a constable during the 2020 Northeast Delhi riots, was denied bail on Thursday by a Delhi Court. Pathan, who is currently lodged in Delhi's Tihar Jail, was arrested on 3 March 2020 from Uttar Pradesh's Shamli district in connection with violent clashes that broke out in northeast Delhi on 24 February 2020, which left 53 people dead. Pathan is accused in two riot-related cases, notably for brandishing a firearm at Head Constable Deepak Dahiya and plotting the murder of a man named Rohit Shukla. He faces multiple charges under the Arms Act and the Indian Penal Code (IPC), including rioting, obstructing public officials and promoting enmity.—*PTI*

—*WIKIPEDIA*

Kavitha gets HC notice in excise policy case

HYDERABAD, 12 MARCH

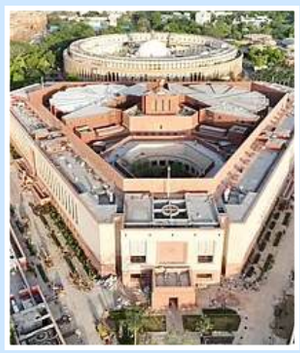
CBI officials served a Delhi High Court notice to Telangana Jagruthi president K Kavitha on Thursday in connection with the excise policy case. Kavitha said on X that the central agency served her a notice. In the notice, Kavitha, who was among those discharged in the case by a Delhi court recently, was informed that the application/petition filed by the CBI against the trial court's decision is fixed for hearing on 16 March. The court also asked former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and 22 others to respond to the CBI's petition challenging their discharge in the excise policy case. Kavitha is the daughter of BRS president and former Telangana chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao.—*PTI*

SWORN IN AS 22ND GUV

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee greets newly appointed Governor RN Ravi, right, during his swearing-in ceremony held at Lok Bhavan in Kolkata in West Bengal on Thursday—*PTI*

PARL PANEL SAYS NO EXPENDITURE IN GASIFICATION SCHEME

A parliamentary committee has flagged significant delays in expenditure under the scheme for the promotion of coal, lignite gasification, noting zero spending for most of 2025-26 despite a revised allocation of Rs 285 crore, and suggested a time-bound spending framework. The standing committee on coal, mines and steel was of the view that the scheme's outlay was brought down from Rs 300 crore at Budget Estimates (BE) 2025-26 to Rs 285 crore at Revised Estimates (RE) stage due to milestone-based needs. — PTI



193 MPs sign notice seeking CEC's removal

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

A total of 130 Lok Sabha MPs and 63 Rajya Sabha MPs have signed notices seeking the removal of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, a source said.

The notice is likely to be submitted in at least in one House on 13 March, although it is not clear in which House it would be introduced first.

An Opposition leader, meanwhile, said MPs have shown great enthusiasm in signing the notice, and several lawmakers came forward to sign it on Thursday as well, even though the requisite numbers had been attained.

According to rules, at least 100 MPs must sign a notice seeking the removal of the CEC in the Lok Sabha, and the required strength in the Rajya Sabha is 50.

The notice has been signed by MPs of INDIA, the source said. MPs from the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which is no longer officially part of the bloc, also signed the notice.

Seven charges are listed against the CEC in the notice, ranging from "partisan and discriminatory conduct in office" to "deliberate obstruction of investigation of electoral fraud" and "mass disenfranchisement." — *PTI*

In a blow to CPI(M), Sudhakaran to contest polls as independent

ALAPPUZHA, 12 MARCH

Veteran CPI(M) leader G Sudhakaran on Thursday announced the severing of his ties with the party and declared his candidature as independent from Ambalapuzha in the upcoming Assembly polls.

The former state minister had recently said he would not renew his party membership, alleging personal attacks by a section of CPI(M) cadres on social media, due to which he was unable to function even in the branch committee.

Sudhakaran, who began his political career as a Left student activist, also alleged negligence by the CPI(M)'s Alappuzha district leadership in both organisational and government programmes.

A four-time MLA, Sudhakaran said that even after deciding to contest as an independent, he would not speak against the Communist party and would not indulge in any character assassination.

He said there was no question of support from any other party as he had not entered into any agreement with any political entity.

Regarding contesting against the CPI(M), he said his fight was not against the party.

When asked about his earlier comments that all party leaders cannot contest elections every time, when VS Achuthanandan had expressed his desire to contest, he said he had not seen the video of those remarks.

He said speak about political issues during the campaign with focus on corruption.

He said he had not approached Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan seeking any intervention.

The leader represented the Kayamkulam constituency from 1996 to 2001 and later served as the legislator from the Ambalapuzha constituency from 2006 to 2021. —*PTI*

AIADMK says no alliance talks with TVK

TIRUCHIRAPPALLI, 12 MARCH

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami has denied any talks with the actor-politician Vijay-led TVK for an electoral alliance and said this was "only the media's imagination."

He stated that no such discussions took place and blamed the media for the speculation.

"We have not spoken with TVK about the alliance as speculated. Talks on alliance with TVK are purely imaginary and you are spreading it," the AIADMK chief said in reply to a question from reporters in Tiruchirappalli on Wednesday night.

Asked if ally BJP has engaged the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam for a poll pact, Palaniswami said, "As far as our alliance is concerned, we are not talking."

Speaking to reporters at a hotel after meeting Union Ministers Piyush Goyal and L Murugan, following the NDA rally that was addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the AIADMK leader clarified that the meeting did not revolve around seat-sharing negotiations.

On Chief Minister MK Stalin's remark that the upcoming Assembly election was a contest between Delhi and Tamil Nadu, the AIADMK chief said such statements showed that the CM lacked confidence. —*PTI*

Bengal Assembly polls may be held in two phases

KOLKATA, 12 MARCH

The West Bengal assembly elections are expected to be held in two phases, a senior official from the Election Commission announced on Thursday. The final decision will be made following further discussions at the EC's New Delhi headquarters. "The assembly elections to 294 seats in West Bengal will most likely be held in two phases from next month," he stated.

Most political parties in the state, except the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC), had requested a one or two-phase election during recent talks with Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar in Kolkata. The official noted that similar suggestions had been made by other officials, including security forces. "Conducting assembly elections in West Bengal in two phases would help check poll-related violence as miscreants would not get the time to move from one place to another to create disturbances. This factor will also be considered before taking the final call," he explained.

When asked if a single-phase election was possible, he responded, "We had conducted the assembly elections in Maharashtra, which has 288 seats, in one phase in 2024. It is not an impossible task to conduct a single-phase election in West Bengal, but this time, it is very unlikely." Law and order concerns in West Bengal remain a major issue, with senior officials assuring a strict vigil. —*PTI*

God saved me: Farooq Abdullah on assassination bid

- Despite being a Z+ category protectee, Abdullah highlighted a glaring lack of basic security protocols at the venue of the wedding.

JAMMU, 12 MARCH

Veteran politician and National Conference (NC) president Farooq Abdullah on Thursday described his narrow escape from an assassination attempt as an act of divine intervention.

The former chief minister, 88, was targeted at point-blank range on 11 March while leaving a marriage pavilion in the Greater Kailash area on the outskirts of Jammu.

"I am fine and God has saved me," Abdullah said.

The assailant, Kamal Singh Jamwal, hailing from Purani Mandi, had reportedly been waiting two decades for an opportunity to kill Abdullah as he had a "personal motive"

CCTV camera footage showed that the gunman had positioned himself directly behind him, but an alert police officer and an NSG commando overpowered the attacker.

Despite being a Z+ category protectee, Abdullah highlighted a glaring lack of basic security protocols at the venue.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah spoke with Abdullah to check on his well-being.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah met his father Farooq hours after security personnel foiled an assassination attempt.

Several leaders also enquire about his well-being and demanded a thorough probe into the incident.

Farooq's assassination bid figured in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday, with Opposition parties blaming revocation of statehood for the incident, while the Centre promised a comprehensive investigation.

Leader of the Opposition in Lok sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, raised the issue, saying the Farooq's security was at risk.

NON-BAILABLE WARRANT AGAINST FAROOQ

A local court on Thursday issued a non-bailable warrant against Farooq in the Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA) scam case. It rejected his plea seeking an exemption from appearing before the court. —*PTI*

OVER ATTACK ON IRAN

Congress' Aiyar, Tharoor face-off in 'open letter war'

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

A public war of words has erupted within Congress after veteran leader Mani Shankar Aiyar declared he was "parting ways" with party colleague Shashi Tharoor, who in turn accused Aiyar of making "many gratuitous" remarks.

The row began after Aiyar wrote an open letter to Tharoor, published in Frontline, criticising his comments on a television interview about the Iran war.

Aiyar said he was "shocked to the core" by Tharoor's remarks defending India's "cautious" and "balanced" diplomatic stance that avoided directly condemning US. He described the conflict as an "illegal and sinful war" against Iran and wrote that Tharoor's views had disturbed him so deeply that he woke at 3am to write the letter.

Mani said he had earlier backed Tharoor in the Congress Presidential election despite knowing he would lose to Mallikarjun Kharge. "I now find I should have championed a worthier cause," he wrote. Aiyar also criticised Tharoor's past remarks on the Sabarimala temple issue, saying they had earlier signalled that he was "not quite one of us".

"I could barely believe my ears that an intelligent, scholarly, modern-minded St. Stephen's graduate, and post-graduate from an Ivy League college, could be so backward as to endorse a thoroughly sexist, gender-discriminatory practice that punishes women," Aiyar said. Responding in an open letter published by NDTV on Thursday, Tharoor said disagreement was natural in a democracy but questioning a colleague's patriotism weakened public debate.

He said his views on international affairs were guided by a nationalist perspective. Recognising geopolitical realities was not "moral surrender" but responsible statecraft, he argued. He added that Aiyar's announcement of a "parting of ways" was disingenuous, as the split had already occurred through repeated public criticism of his character.

— *PTI*

HC upholds life term of 5 BJP cadres in CPI(M) activist's murder

KOCHI, 12 MARCH

The Kerala High Court has upheld the life sentence of five BJP activists for the murder of a CPI(M) worker by throwing a bomb at him in Kannur in 2006.

The court noted that the killing of 24-year-old Yackoob was a retaliation for the assault of a BJP worker a few days before the incident.

It upheld the decision of the trial court convicting and sentencing to life Vijesh, 43, Prakashan, 48, Kavyesh, 43, Manoharan, 31 and Sankaran Master, 49, saying there were no discrepancies in the statements of the witnesses.

The bench said that the post-mortem findings were consistent with death due to a blast injury on the head.

The defence lawyers had claimed that the statements of the witnesses were not the same and had differences, but the bench rejected it.

The High Court also rejected the defence argument of a delay in lodging an FIR. —*PTI*

HC refuses to lift ban on Delhi University protests

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

The Delhi High Court on Thursday declined to stay the blanket ban on protests, processions, and demonstrations at Delhi University, but stated that such a ban cannot legally exist.

The court directed the university and Delhi Police to respond to a law student's petition challenging the prohibition. "Since when has this order been operating? Let it operate for 10 more days," said Chief Justice DK Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia, emphasising the need for balance.

Replies are to be filed within a week, with the matter scheduled for hearing on 25 March.

Notices were also issued to the central government and two DU colleges. The university's counsel explained the proctor's decision was based on a police prohibitory order against gatherings of five or more people in the north campus.

During proceedings, the court questioned the police and university, emphasising that a blanket ban cannot exist and that restrictions with safeguards are permissible.

The court urged students to behave responsibly. The petition filed by law student Uday Bhadoriya, claimed the ban was vague, arbitary and violated fundamental right. —*PTI*

Heroin worth Rs 12 cr dropped by Pak drone seized

JAMMU, 12 MARCH

Officials recovered approximately 2kg of heroin worth Rs 12 crore near the International Border in Jammu. The drugs were believed to have been dropped by a Pakistani drone on an agricultural land in Bahadurpura village, Bishnah, late Wednesday night. Jammu Police and 101 Battalion BSF carried out the operation after receiving intelligence about a suspicious drone drop. They found a bag attached with a rope and hook containing small packets of heroin. Police called it a significant anti-drug achievement and have registered a case under the NDPS Act to investigate further. Authorities urged locals to report any drug-related activity, especially near the border. *—PTI*

Sariska tigress gives birth to 3, tiger count now 53

JAIPUR, 12 MARCH

A tigress named ST-17 has given birth to three cubs in Rajasthan's Sariska Tiger Reserve, raising the total tiger count to 53. The cubs, captured in camera traps, are in good health with their mother, and this is her second successful litter. Forest Minister Sanjay Sharma called it positive news, emphasising the success of wildlife conservation efforts. Tigers had become extinct in Sariska around 2004-05 but were reintroduced in 2008 through a pioneering relocation programme from Ranthambore. Officials attribute the population increase to prey augmentation, and village relocations. *—PTI*

Indore petrol pump worker dragged to death

INDORE, 12 MARCH

A petrol pump worker was killed after a car driver refused to pay for fuel and allegedly dragged him with the vehicle. Rohit Parmar, aged 22, was attacked early Wednesday at a petrol station in the Sanwer area. After filling the car for Rs 4,000, the driver refused payment and started moving, trapping Parmar's hand. CCTV footage shows the vehicle heading towards Ujjain, but the registration number is unclear. Police registered a case of culpable homicide and are searching for the driver. Witnesses and locals demand the immediate arrest of the suspect following this tragic incident. *—PTI*

Tourism assets idle in Arunachal Pradesh, says CAG

ITANAGAR, 12 MARCH

A CAG audit of tourism infrastructure in Arunachal Pradesh found major lapses in planning, execution and monitoring between 2017-18 and 2021-22, including potentially fraudulent spending, wasteful spending, fund diversion and non-functional assets, along with an inadequate policy framework.

The audit flagged Rs 8.16 crore in potentially fraudulent irregular payments for works recorded as completed but not executed. The report further noted that 41 tourism projects, totalling Rs 87.92 crore, remained non-functional for up to 109 months as of March 2023.

Despite the 2003 tourism policy calling for a comprehensive master plan, the state took no steps to develop high-potential tourism areas, leading the department to execute projects on an ad-hoc basis. The CAG urged the department to recover short deductions of dues, penalise responsible officers, and revive abandoned projects. — *PTI*

LONG QUEUES AT FUEL STATIONS as West Asia war hits nation

Hotels, hostels, households affected; hospitals spared

Fuel shortage has hit the public with long queues appearing at fuel stations. Many states have curtailed LPG supply to commercial establishments and is prioritising households, hospitals etc. Take a look at what some states are dealing with

TAMIL NADU

Long queues of motorists were seen outside petrol stations across Tamil Nadu on Thursday as panic buying started in several cities, triggered by a worsening shortage of commercial LPG that has already forced numerous eateries to shut down or reduce their menus.

While oil marketing companies and state government officials have repeatedly assured the public that there is no shortage of petrol or diesel, the sight of dry outlets in the commercial gas sector has sparked anxiety.

The Tamil Nadu Hotels Association has indicated that thousands of small and medium-sized restaurants are badly hit. The crisis has hit the transport sector too, particularly gas-run auto-rickshaws.

People queue up to buy LPG on Thursday in Patna amid reports of shortages caused by the West Asia war *—PTI*

ANDHRA PRADESH

The Andhra Pradesh LPG Distributors Association on Thursday said that restricting domestic cooking gas for household use can enable the state to tide over the crisis for a fortnight without shortage.

Association president K Srinatha Reddy appealed to domestic consumers to use cooking gas for their own use and refrain from selling it to hotels.

Enticed by money, he said some domestic consumers are selling gas cylinders at up to Rs 2,000 per unit.

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) said on Thursday in a statement that there is no disruption in the supply of cooking gas to its 'laddu' and Annadanam kitchens.

PUDUCHERRY

Petrol bunks in and around Puducherry have been witnessing a large inflow of two-wheeler riders and car owners fearing shortage of supply.

Meanwhile, the crisis in getting the commercial cylinder also continued unabated for the third successive day

TELANGANA

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has directed officials to purchase only electric vehicles henceforth.

He instructed officials to hire only electric vehicles in the Core Urban Region (CURE), mainly comprising the capital.

Delivery personnel prepare to transport an LPG cylinder on a cycle in Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu, amid a shortage of LPG in the country *—PTI*

UTTARAKHAND

The Uttarakhand government has decided to provide commercial gas cylinders to hospitals and educational institutions on priority.The government has also begun preparations to provide wood for commercial use if needed, but asserted that there was no shortage of gas cylinders in the state.

UTTAR PRADESH

Long queues were witnessed outside an LPG agency in Lucknow on Thursday as consumers rushed to collect cooking gas cylinders, officials said.

A large number of people gathered at the Mahagauri Gas Agency at Mahadeva crossing in Bankati block early in the morning. Locals claimed that several consumers began queuing up from around 4 am.

However, District Supply Officer Vimal Kumar Shukla said there was no shortage of LPG cylinders in the district. — PTI

WEST BENGAL

Long queues of auto-rickshaws and domestic consumers were seen outside LPG dispensing stations on Thursday in Kolkata and several districts of West Bengal, as government assurances failed to stop panic buying.

With digital booking systems becoming unreliable, a large number of consumers have started visiting distributor offices to place orders in person

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday directed oil marketing companies to restore booking servers immediately and prioritise supply to households. — PTI

Meghalaya: BSF DIG attacked

SHILLONG, 12 MARCH

A vehicle which was part of the convoy of a BSF DIG was set on fire and some personnel were injured in an attack by a group amid the unrest in the Garo Hills region of Meghalaya, officials said on Thursday.

The incident took place on Wednesday when the DIG, along with other officials, was returning from a meeting in Tura town in the West Garo Hills district near the India-Bangladesh border, they said.

The DIG and the officials accompanying him suffered minor injuries in the incident. A BSF vehicle which was part of the convoy was burnt as it was left behind, the officials said.

The BSF guards the India-Bangladesh border. It is deployed in Meghalaya as 443 km of the 4,096-km border passes through the state.

Meanwhile, the situation in Meghalaya's West Garo Hills district remained tense on Thursday morning following arson and looting said.

Residents in several localities of Tura town kept vigil throughout the night to safeguard their neighbourhoods after incidents of looting, vandalism and arson were reported, they said.

Miscreants looted, vandalised and set fire to several properties, including shops, in different areas of the town, prompting residents to organise themselves and guard their localities to prevent further damage, a senior police officer said. Among the establishments that were targeted was a liquor store in Tura allegedly belonging to a family member of Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma. — *PTI*

Armed men move through a street in the West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya near the Bangladesh border *—SCREENGRAB*

21 Nagas held by Kukis in Manipur freed after talks

IMPHAL, 12 MARCH

Twenty-one Tangkhul Naga civilians, who were detained by Kuki villagers and armed volunteers in Manipur's Ukhrul district, were released early on Thursday after negotiations, officials said.

The civilians, travelling in three vehicles, were detained by Kuki villagers and armed men at Shangkai on Wednesday.

The civilians were brought to the Litan police station, 5 km from Shangkai, and reunited with their families, he said.

Tension remained high on Thursday morning in the Tangkhul Naga-majority district, particularly along areas bordering Kuki-majority Kangpokpi, with security forces conducting patrols.

Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand had expressed "profound concern regarding the distressing situation along the Ukhrul-Imphal Road, where innocent civilians have been reportedly held captive under the area covered by Litan police station."

Singh had appealed to those responsible to uphold human values and ensure the safe release of all civilians.

Shangkai Village Authority had alleged that 'Tangkhul volunteers' fired upon villagers who were working in the fields, following which they were detained.

It also said two Kukis, who had gone to repair a water pipeline, were attacked and remained missing.

Gunfights between armed groups of two communities were also reported in nearby Thawai Kuki and Mahadeva areas in the district on Wednesday. — *PTI*

Andhra milk adulteration toll rises to 13

RAJA'VARAM, 12 MARCH

The death toll in the suspected milk adulteration incident in East Godavari district has risen to 13. Seven persons continue to receive treatment at hospitals in Rajamahendravaram, an official said on Thursday.

Health officials said the cluster of cases was first noticed on 22 February after several elderly residents were admitted to hospitals with anuria, vomiting, abdominal pain and acute renal dysfunction requiring dialysis.

Residents from Chowdeswaranagar and Swaroopanagar areas of Lalacheruvu reportedly fell ill after consuming milk suspected to be adulterated and supplied in the locality.

Authorities noted that strong epidemiological indicators point towards milk adulteration as the probable cause and multiple departments have initiated action.

Medical examinations revealed elevated levels of blood urea and serum creatinine among the affected persons, suggesting possible toxic exposure, they said.

Preliminary investigations indicated milk consumption as the main source of exposure. The milk was reportedly supplied to nearly 106 families by Varalakshmi Milk Dairy in Narasapuram village of Korukonda mandal, following which the supply was immediately halted.

The suspected milk vendor, Addala Ganeswararao, 33, has been taken into custody and the dairy unit associated with the supply has been sealed. — *PTI*

'I AM NOT A MINOR NOW'

It is no 'love jihad,' says Monalisa

T'PURAM, 12 MARCH

Monalisa Bhonsle, the young woman who shot to fame during the Prayagraj Kumbh Mela last year, said on Thursday that her marriage to a Muslim here was as per her choice and according to Hindu customs, rejecting allegations that it was a case of "love-jihad." Bhonsle, who hails from Madhya Pradesh, said neither she nor her husband had changed their religions, and that she had in fact forced him to marry her.

"He did not want to marry me, but I forced him to do so. We got married according to Hindu customs," she told reporters here. "We respect all religions and we have not converted," they added.

Earlier, Monalisa, had dismissed reports that she is underage. Bhonsle told reporters, "I am 18 years old," asserting her age. Her husband confirmed their marriage was registered and said it would not have been possible if she were underage.

When asked whether they planned to stay in Kerala, her husband said it depended on Bhonsle. She expressed her liking for Kerala and wished to remain there. She also said a movie she starred in had finished filming, with another going on.

Her husband said they met six months ago while cast for a film, but shooting had not yet started. — *PTI*

SC bins plea on Netaji's ashes

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

- After CJI Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi refused to entertain the plea on Thursday, advocate Singhvi, appearing for petitioner Ashis Ray, sought permission to withdraw it

The Supreme Court refused to entertain a plea filed by the grandnephew of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, seeking directions to bring back to India the ashes believed to be those of Bose from Tokyo's Renkoji temple.

After Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi showed its disinclination to entertain the plea on Thursday, senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for petitioner Ashis Ray, sought permission to withdraw it.

The bench permitted him to withdraw the petition.

The CJI asked how many times this issue would come up before the SC. The bench said last year itself, the top court had dismissed one petition.

Singhvi said this was not the issue that had come up before the court earlier.

Singhvi said it is recorded that every head of state from India has paid obeisance at the Renkoji temple in Japan.

He said the matter which the SC had dealt with earlier was concerning declaring whether Bose had died or not.

Singhvi said Bose has only one heir, who is his 84-year-old daughter, and the petitioner is his grandnephew.

"She (daughter) is not before us," the bench said, adding that if she wanted the ashes to be brought to the country, she must come.

Singhvi said the daughter was appearing virtually in the court. — *PTI*

SC grants bail to J&K separatist Shabir in terror case

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

The Supreme Court granted bail to Kashmiri separatist leader Shabir Ahmed Shah on Thursday in a terror funding case, in which he was arrested by NIA on 4 June 2019.

Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta said a detailed order will follow with some stringent bail conditions for Shah.

The bench passed the order after hearing arguments on behalf of Shah, represented by senior advocate Colin Gonsalves. Senior advocate Siddharth Luthra appeared on behalf of NIA. During the hearing, the bench pointed out several anomalies and flagged the long jailing of Shah.

On 4 September 2005, the court refused to grant interim bail to Shah in the case and issued a notice to the NIA, seeking its response on his plea challenging a Delhi HC order dated 12 June 2025, that denied him relief. — *PTI*

US STARTS PROBE AGAINST INDIA OVER 'unfair foreign practices'

- The United States Trade Representative (USTR) has announced that it has initiated investigations against its trading partners, including India, China, Japan, and the European Union (EU), to look into and address unfair foreign practices that are adversely affecting American manufacturing.

The US Trade Representative (USTR) on 11 March said it has launched a fresh round of Section 301 trade investigations targeting policies and industrial practices of 16 economies, including India and China.

Following a decision of the US Supreme Court striking down sweeping tariffs of the Trump administration, US President Donald Trump has announced 10 per cent tariffs on all countries for 150 days from 24 February.

Now, initiation of this probe marks a significant escalation in trade scrutiny. Here are a few questions and answers to understand the issue.

WHAT IS THIS INVESTIGATION?

The United States Trade Representative (USTR) has announced that it has initiated investigations against its trading partners, including India, China, Japan, and the European Union (EU), to look into and address unfair foreign practices that are adversely affecting American manufacturing.

The probe targets policies and industrial practices of 16 economies.

The probe covers sectors, including steel, aluminum, automobiles, batteries, electronics, chemicals, machinery, semiconductors, and solar modules.

WHICH 16 ECONOMIES ARE COVERED UNDER THE PROBE?

There are 15 countries and the 27-nation EU bloc. The nations are China, Singapore, Switzerland, Norway, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, South Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, Bangladesh, Mexico, Japan, and India.

WHY THIS PROBE?

After the US Supreme Court struck down tariffs imposed by the Trump administration. On February 20, Trump signed a proclamation to impose a temporary import duty of 10 per cent on all countries to replace the tariffs invalidated by the Court. After that, the President had stated that the US has other alternatives to impose such levies.

On February 20, a White House Fact Sheet stated that the President has directed the Office of the USR to use its Section 301 authority to investigate certain unreasonable and discriminatory acts, policies, and practices that burden or restrict US commerce.

WHAT IS THE INVESTIGATION PROCESS?

Under Section 301 of the US Trade Act of 1974, the US government may investigate whether foreign trade practices are unreasonable or discriminatory and harm American commerce.

The investigations will determine whether those acts, policies, and practices are unreasonable or discriminatory and burden or restrict US commerce.

"The probe will examine whether policies such as industrial subsidies, state-supported manufacturing expansion, activities of state-owned enterprises, market-access barriers, currency practices or suppressed domestic demand have contributed to global manufacturing overcapacity that burdens US commerce, think tank GTRI said.

If such practices are confirmed, Washington may impose retaliatory trade measures, including additional tariffs, quantitative restrictions or other trade barriers.

According to the GTRI, as per a defined process, public dockets for written submissions will open on March 17, allowing companies, trade groups and governments to submit their comments on the probe.

Written submissions and requests to participate in hearings must be filed by April 15. Public hearings will take place from May 5-8 at the US International Trade Commission in Washington. Rebuttal submissions must be filed within seven days after the hearings conclude. After consultations with the governments concerned, the USTR will determine whether the practices under investigation warrant retaliatory action.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR INDIA?

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) stated that the US investigation identifies several sectors in India where structural excess capacity or export surpluses may exist. These include solar modules, petrochemicals, steel, textiles, health-related goods, construction materials and automotive products.

According to the US notice, India's solar-module manufacturing capacity is already nearly three times domestic demand, suggesting the possibility of export-driven production surpluses. Similar concerns are raised about expanding capacity in petrochemicals and steel, GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

Apex exporters' body FIEO said the investigation seems largely aimed at addressing global concerns around structural overcapacity in manufacturing.

"India's export growth is largely demand-driven and diversified, so we do not see any immediate concern, though the situation will need to be watched," FIEO Director General Ajay Sahai said.

WHICH ALL LAWS IS THE US USING TO IMPOSE TARIFFS?

International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) 1977: Trump in February 2025 invoked this to impose tariffs. The court on February 20 this year ruled that Trump can not use this to impose tariffs.

Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974: On February 20, 2026, Trump invoked this to impose 10 per cent tariffs on all countries for 150 days. The US President can increase the tariffs to 15 per cent.

Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962: Trump has imposed sector-specific tariffs (certain steel and aluminium products and auto components) under this. It allows trade restrictions on national-security grounds.

The US can potentially use it to include additional sectors, GTRI said.

Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974: It is designed to address unfair foreign practices affecting US commerce. It can be used to respond to unjustifiable, unreasonable, or discriminatory foreign government practices that burden or restrict US commerce.

"Section 301 remains an important US trade tool, it is slower and more legally constrained than the reciprocal tariff system invalidated by the Supreme Court. Section 301 investigations require evidence of harm and must be tied to specific trade practices," GTRI said.

Section 302(b) of the Trade Act of 1974: Under this, the USTR can self-initiate an investigation under Section 301. —*PTI*

SALAR

LPG crisis to hit Pizza Hut, KFC, McDonald's ops

A shortage of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) in the country could disrupt operations of quick-service restaurant (QSR) chains such as KFC, Pizza Hut and McDonald's, while also pushing up input costs for consumer-facing companies, as supply constraints ripple across sectors from restaurants to glass and plastics manufacturing.

Brokerage Goldman Sachs, in a report, said India faces an LPG shortage, importing 60 per cent of its supply, with 90 per cent of imports transiting the geopolitically impacted Strait of Hormuz.

Despite a 25 per cent increase in domestic production, supply remains constrained. The government is prioritising LPG for domestic cooking and essential sectors, like hospitals, while restricting supply to non-essential commercial enterprises, including restaurants.

Media reports indicate that LPG supply to other commercial users, including restaurants and several industries, has been restricted, potentially affecting operations across multiple sectors.

QSR CHAINS FACE OPERATIONAL RISK

QSR chains, including those operated by Jubilant FoodWorks (Domino's), Devyani International (Yum Brands), Sapphire Foods (KFC and Pizza Hut) and Westlife Foodworld (McDonald's), rely heavily on commercial LPG cylinders for kitchen operations.

"As per our channel checks, the inventory of LPG cylinders at restaurants is less than one week. Hence, if there is a shortage of commercial LPG cylinders, it would impact the ability of QSR chains to service normal levels of demand, which would lead to a temporary hit to revenues," it said.

Reports suggest that the LPG shortage is causing some restaurants to shut down.

GLASS SUPPLY DISRUPTIONS MAY RAISE COSTS FOR LIQUOR COMPANIES

Gas shortages are also affecting the glass manufacturing sector. One of the players, Borosil Ltd, issued a release stating that they are facing a shortage of gas supplies in their manufacturing facilities, leading to a curtailment in production.

"If there is a broad-based shortage of glass production, it can lead to an increase in glass prices, which is a key input cost for alcoholic beverages companies like United Spirits, where glass is 40 per cent of the input costs," Goldman Sachs said.

POTENTIAL PLASTICS PRICE SPIKE COULD AFFECT FMCG FIRMS

Separately, the government has directed refineries and petrochemical complexes to maximise LPG output by diverting propane, butane and propylene streams to the LPG pool.

This move could tighten the supply of petrochemical feedstocks, potentially pushing up the prices of plastics. Higher plastic costs could translate into rising input costs for fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and paint companies that rely on crude derivatives for packaging and production inputs.

A separate report by Motilal Oswal said 90 per cent of LPG imports originate from West Asia suppliers, such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait. Industry estimates indicate that 80-85 per cent of India's LPG imports transit through the Strait of Hormuz, making the commodity particularly exposed to disruptions in the region.

"Compared with other energy imports, LPG is the most exposed fuel in India's basket. By comparison, 50-55 per cent of LNG and 40-50 per cent of crude oil imports pass through the Strait," it said.

"Unlike crude oil, India does not maintain strategic LPG reserves, which means supply disruptions tend to show up quickly in the market, particularly in the commercial segment where inventory buffers are smaller."

A small restaurant typically consumes 1-2 commercial cylinders (19kg) per day, mid-size restaurants 3-5 cylinders, and large hotel kitchens 6-10 cylinders daily, depending on scale and operating hours.

Inventory buffers across restaurants tend to be limited, it said, adding that most kitchens maintain 2-6 days of cylinder inventory, given storage constraints and frequent delivery cycles.

"As a result, any supply disruption can begin to impact operations within 48-72 hours," the report said.

Talking of storage restrictions, the Motilal Oswal report said storage of LPG above 100kg (about five 19kg cylinders) requires licenses and compliance with additional safety requirements, making this impractical for small restaurant outlets. —*PTI*

A gas agency worker takes out LPG cylinderS for delivery as people queue up amid panic buying in Bengaluru's Jayamahal —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Landmark euthanasia verdict is because Aruna lived in pain for 42 yrs

Harish Rana has been comatose for over 13 years. India's euthanasia debate took shape with the Aruna Shanbaug case in 2011. Shanbaug was left in a vegetative state after she was raped in 1973 at a Mumbai hospital

- On 27 November, 1973, while working as a junior nurse at King Edward Memorial (KEM) Hospital in Mumbai, Shanbaug was attacked by a hospital janitor, Sohanlal Bharta Valmiki. Valmiki strangled her with a metal dog chain and sexually assaulted her. The strangulation cut off oxygen to her brain, causing irreversible damage that left her paralysed, blind, and deaf.

The cases of Aruna Shanbaug, the Mumbai nurse who died in 2015 after spending 42 years in a coma, and Harish Rana, a 32-year-old man from Ghaziabad who has been in a vegetative state since 2013, have come to symbolise India's long and emotive debate over passive euthanasia.

On Wednesday, Supreme Court delivered a landmark judgment allowing the withdrawal of life support for Rana, bringing a measure of closure to a debate that has for decades raised complex questions about morality, compassion and the right to die with dignity.

A bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and KV Viswanathan permitted the withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment for Rana, who has remained in a coma for more than a decade. The court directed the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, to ensure that life support is withdrawn through a carefully tailored medical plan so that his dignity is preserved.

The bench also asked the Union government to consider bringing comprehensive legislation on passive euthanasia.

The plea was filed on Rana's behalf by his father Ashok Rana. Passive euthanasia refers to the intentional act of allowing a patient to die by withholding or withdrawing medical treatment or life support necessary to keep them alive.

The ruling has been welcomed by activists and medical professionals who have long advocated clearer and more practical procedures for end-of-life decisions.

Vipul Mudgal, director of the NGO Common Cause, which had approached the Supreme Court in 2018 on the issue, said the judgment reinforces the principle that dignity should guide decisions about life and death.

"If there is dignity in life, and if there is meaning in life, by all means you continue," Mudgal told PTI.

Dr Surendra Dhelia of the Society for the Right to Die with Dignity, one of the earliest advocates of euthanasia in India, described the ruling as an important step forward.

India's legal debate on euthanasia began to take shape with the Aruna Shanbaug case in 2011. Shanbaug had been left in a persistent vegetative state after a brutal sexual assault in a Mumbai hospital in November 1973.

While the Supreme Court rejected a plea seeking euthanasia on her behalf, it ruled that passive euthanasia could be permitted in cases involving patients in a permanent vegetative state. Shanbaug eventually died of pneumonia in 2015.

However, according to Dhelia, the procedures established by the court were so complex that the process was rarely followed in practice.

The legal framework evolved further in 2018, when the Supreme Court, in the Common Cause versus Union of India case, recognised the "right to die with dignity" as a fundamental right under Article 21.

In that ruling, the court legalised passive euthanasia and also recognised "living wills", formally known as Advance Medical Directives. These documents allow individuals to specify their wishes about medical treatment in case they become terminally ill or incapable of making decisions.

Mudgal said the latest verdict strengthens the principle established in 2018 by affirming a person's right to determine the course of medical treatment when recovery is impossible.

"We said that everybody should be permitted to write their own living will, specifying that if they are in a vegetative state or terminally ill, they should not be subjected to ventilators or artificial resuscitation," he said.

In January 2023, a five-judge Constitution bench modified the 2018 guidelines to make the process of granting passive euthanasia easier for terminally ill patients.

Under the revised procedure, a primary medical board and a secondary medical board must review and certify whether life support can be withdrawn. The first board typically includes the patient's physician and a specialist who assess the medical condition and chances of survival.

A second board, which includes a doctor nominated by the district's chief medical officer, must then give its opinion within 48 hours.

Mudgal said the Supreme Court's ruling in Rana's case also clarifies that judicial intervention is not required in every instance where passive euthanasia is considered.

"If a person writes an advance medical directive, they should not be subjected to unwanted medical intrusion," he said. "If hospitals follow the protocol of a two-tier medical review, there should be no need to approach the courts each time."

Doctors and activists, however, say the system could still be simplified further to prevent prolonged suffering for terminally ill patients.

Dhelia noted that passive euthanasia has informally been practised in hospitals for decades in cases where recovery is impossible and families agree to withdraw life support.

Nevertheless, he argued that the legal framework should be streamlined so that patients do not endure prolonged suffering while procedural approvals are obtained.

"It's probably only a matter of time before debates expand to voluntary active euthanasia, involuntary euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide," he added.

The Supreme Court's ruling in Rana's case was based on medical evidence indicating that he survives solely through clinically administered nutrition delivered through percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy tubes.

Harish Rana had been pursuing a BTech degree at Panjab University and was a football enthusiast when he fell from the fourth floor of his paying guest accommodation in 2013, suffering a severe brain injury that left him in a coma. —*PTI*

Ships sink, oil burns and strikes continue

IRAN LISTS THREE CONDITIONS TO END WAR WITH US, ISRAEL

TEHRAN, 12 MARCH

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian on Thursday spelt out three conditions that would need to be fulfilled to end the war with Israel and US. "Talking to leaders of Russia and Pakistan, I reaffirmed Iran's commitment to peace in the region.

The only way to end this war--ignited by the Zionist regime and US--is recognising Iran's legitimate rights, payment of reparations, and firm international guarantees against future aggression," he wrote on X.

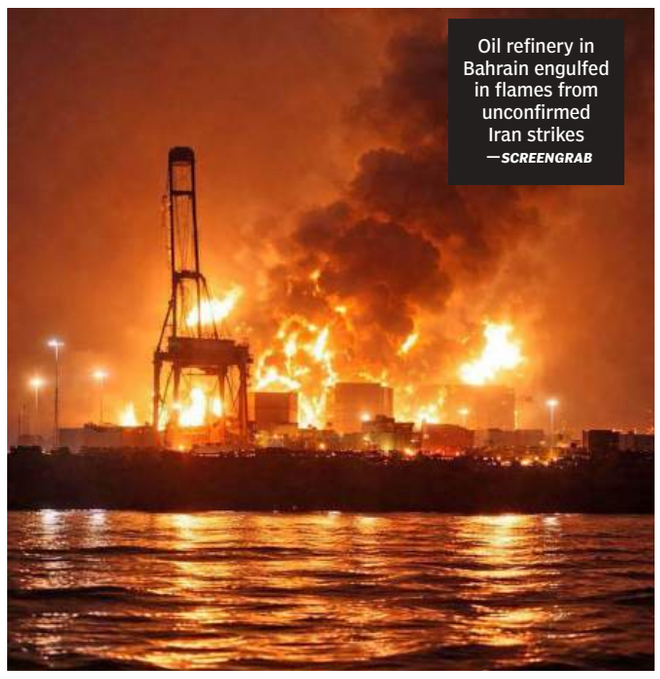
This was the first time that a senior leader from the Islamic Republic of Iran has sought reparations.

Russian President Vladimir Putin had called Pezeshkian on Tuesday and called for "de-escalation".

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump while at a claimed at a campaign rally in Kentucky that the Unites States won the war in the first hour. "You never like to say too early you won. We won," Trump said. "In the first hour it was over."

Trump had earlier said that he could end the war whenever he wanted to.

However Trump he contradicted himself again. "We don't want to leave early, do we? We've got to finish the job," he said. *—Agencies*



Oil refinery in Bahrain engulfed in flames from unconfirmed Iran strikes —SCREENGRAB

US INTELLIGENCE AGENCY WARNS THAT IRAN MAY ATTACK CALIFORNIA

LOS ANGELES, 12 MARCH

The FBI warned law enforcement officers that Iran may retaliate with surprise drone attacks in California. A security bulletin alert was sent on 28 February but surfaced on Wednesday – the day Israel-US killed supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The alert said, Iran may retaliate "specifically against unspecified targets in California". However, the FBI has no "additional information on the timing, method, or target of this alleged attack."

California Governor Gavin Newsom said he was not aware of any "imminent threats" to the state.

President Donald Trump, said he knows the number of "sleeper cells" Iran has in US.

"A lot of people came in through Biden's with his stupid open border. But we know where most of them are." he said. *—Agencies*

> **They gave me like 20 names, and I'm like falling asleep, I didn't like any of them. Then I see (Operation) Epic Fury. I said, 'I like that name. I like that name'**
>
> -Donald Trump, US President

WHO flags health risks of 'black rain'

WHO warned that the "black rain" caused by Israeli-US strikes on Iran's oil facilities releases cancer causing toxic hydrocarbons, sulfur oxides and nitrogen compounds, into the air. Amid multiple reports of oil-laden rain can contaminate water and food sources, WHO warned.

Cyberattack hits US medical firm

Stryker, a major US medical equipment firm said a cyberattack hit its networks. The logo of Handala, a hacking group linked to Iran, was seen on the company login pages. Stryker's statement said the cyberattack hit its Microsoft programs. Stryker believes there were no indications of malware.

— PTI

UNSC condemns Iran's attacks on Gulf, Jordan

UNITED NATIONS, 12 MARCH

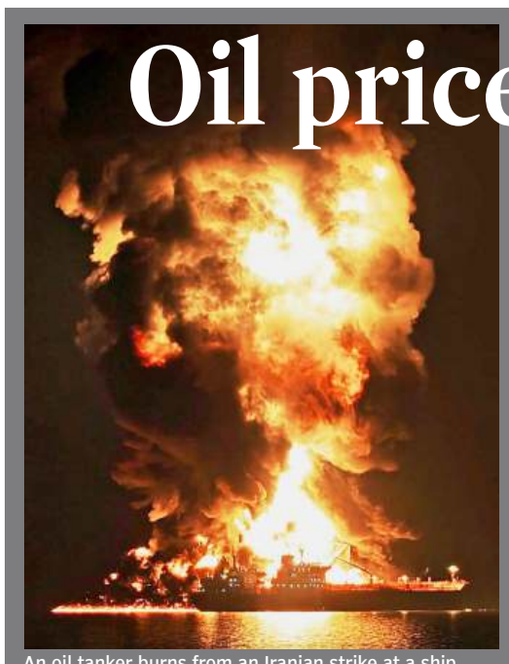
UN Security Council condemned the attacks by Iran against Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Jordan and demanded cessation of attacks while denouncing Iran's threats of closing the Strait of Hormuz. The Council, currently under US presidency, adopted the resolution on Wednesday with 13 votes in favour, none against and abstentions by veto-wielding permanent members China and Russia. India cosponsored along with over 135 nations, including Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Myanmar, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Singapore, Spain, Ukraine, UAE, UK, and Yemen. *—PTI*

S Africa summons US ambassador over remarks

JOHANNESBURG, 12 MARCH

South Africa has summoned its new US ambassador, Leo Brent Bozell III, over recent remarks criticised as undiplomatic, as diplomatic tensions deepen. The foreign minister explained that Bozell was called to clarify comments made at a business meeting, where he challenged South Africa's diplomatic ties with Iran and its affirmative action laws, comparing them to apartheid-era race laws. The foreign ministry's Zane Dangor said Bozell met officials, apologised, and expressed regret. US government comments remain absent. The rift has grown since Trump's return, with Trump accusing South Africa of targeting white farmers—a claim denied by some groups. Bozell earlier criticised a court ruling on a racist chant, calling it hate speech, but later clarified his personal view. *—PTI*

Oil prices cross $100 as war rages on



An oil tanker burns from an Iranian strike at a ship transfer zone at Iraq's Khor al-Zubair port —PTI

> **I warned the President of Lebanon that if Beirut cannot control its territory and stop Hezbollah from threatening northern communities and firing at Israel, we will take the territory and do it ourselves. The Prime Minister and I have instructed the IDF to prepare to expand operations in Lebanon to restore security to the north.**
>
> -Israel Katz, Israel Defense Minister

TEHRAN, 12 MARCH

Iran maintained pressure on the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil is transported, sending oil prices back up to USD 100 a barrel, up some 38 per cent from when the war started as drones and missiles continued to fly across West Asia.

Prices have swung back and forth recently, surging to around USD 120 a barrel at one point.

Israel also claimed that it bombed more of Iran's nuclear facilities, but this was not immediately confirmed, as strikes continued in Tehran.

Amid speculation that the US might target Kharg Island, Iran's main oil terminal, Parliamentary Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf said that would "make the Persian Gulf run with the blood of invaders."

'GOOD FOR AMERICA'

President Donald Trump said that it was good for the US that oil prices were increasing, even as Russia's daily revenues from oil have averaged 14 per cent higher than in February.

"The US is the largest oil producer in the world, so when oil prices go up, we make a lot of money," Trump posted on Truth Social.

Russia earned nearly USD 7 billion in fossil fuel exports during the war, said one independent organisation.

SHIPS STRUCK

A container ship was hit with a projectile off the coast of Dubai, sparking a small fire, though the crew were safe. Drones were launched toward the cities of Irbil and Sulaymaniyah in Iraq's Kurdistan region, while in the southern part of the country, an oil vessel flying the Australian flag was struck near Khor Al-Zubair Port.

DRONES IN THE GULF

Kuwait said an Iranian drone wounded two people at a residential building, and that a drone attack on Kuwait International Airport inflicted damage but no casualties. Drones were also reported in Dubai and Saudi Arabia's Riyadh and Shaybah oil field. An Iranian attack sparked a major fire on Muharraq Island, home to Bahrain's international airport.

A rescue worker in Iran after Israeli-US strikes — IRANIAN RED CRESCENT SOCIETY

3.2 million people have been displaced in Iran because of the bombing. Most have fled from Tehran and major cities to the north: UN

SLAUGHTER IN BEIRUT

Israel killed at least 12 people and wounded 31 others when striking a seaside area where displaced people were sheltering in Beirut, the Lebanese Health Ministry said. The Israeli military said it was "not aware" of a strike at that location.

BANKS CLOSE IN THE GULF

In the UAE, Citibank said it would close all but one of its branches due to Iranian threats on financial institutions in the region. HSBC in Doha said they're suspending operations. *—Agencies*

How are India's neighbours doing?

Lanka's tea industry is facing a loss of USD 10 million/week

COLOMBO, 12 MARCH

Sri Lanka's tea industry faces severe disruptions as the ongoing war impacts trade. Exporters estimate a loss of USD 10 million per week.

Around 52 per cent of Sri Lanka's tea exports are to the Gulf region. The major importing countries of Ceylon Tea in the region include Iraq, Iran, Libya, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and the UAE.

According to 2025 tea export statistics, about 125 million kilograms of Ceylon tea were exported to the Gulf region, with an estimated value of USD 750 million.

With their sacks full of tea leaves after a morning at a plantation, workers head to a factory in Ramboda, Sri Lanka—UN

Supply routes to the Gulf go via the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea Suez Canal. Although there is no blockade on the Suez Canal, due to the war risk, both are not being used by major shipping lines.

Although Libya and Turkey can be reached via Africa, the exorbitant freight charges have prevented buyers in those countries from importing tea at the moment.

Notably, Sri Lanka has settled about 95 per cent of the debt to Iran under the Tea for Oil mechanism. Iran purchases about 11 million kg of tea from Sri Lanka annually under the barter deal. *—PTI*

Bangladesh

Bangladesh's garment sector, which is the 2nd largest globally and the backbone of its economy, faces shortages of petrol and diesel. Bangladesh has requested a US waiver to buy Russian oil.

Myanmar

Vehicles with even-numbered plates can drive on even dates and vehicles with odd numbered plates can drive on odd dates. Vehicles will also have QR codes, to prevent refueling more than one time per day.

Pakistan

Pakistasn hiked prices by PKR 55, one the of highest. It has also issued work-from-home guidelines and cut the fuel allowance for officials by 50 per cent and grounded 60 per cent of the government vehicles.

US SHUTS CONSULATE IN PESHAWAR

WASHINGTON, 12 MARCH

The US State Department will permanently close the US consulate in Pakistan's Peshawar. It is the closest US mission to the Afghan border, used for primary operations and logistics point the 2001 Afghan war.

The Department stated that the closure would save USD 7.5 million per year.

The move comes amid the Trump administration's goal of federal downsizing, it is unrelated to the Iran war.

The Peshawar consulate, is the first overseas diplomatic mission to close down entirely because of reorganisation.

The State Department cuts included the dismissal of thousands of diplomats and the dismantling of the US Agency for International Development. *—PTI*

MUSLIM NATIONS SLAM MOSQUE CLOSURE

JERUSALEM, 12 MARCH

Eight predominately Muslim nations have condemned Israel for closing the sacred Al-Aqsa Mosque in old Jerusalem during Ramadan.

In a statement on Wednesday, Qatar, Jordan, Indonesia, Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates said that Israel closing the mosque for 12 consecutive days is a "flagrant violation to international law... and the principle of unrestricted access to places of worship". Israeli forces have imposed strict restrictions on worshippers and access to the Old City, citing "security" measures as a result of the ongoing war against Iran. Al-Aqsa Mosque is one of the most sacred sites for Muslims and is a symbol for Palestinian identity. *—Agencies*

'ETHNIC UNITY'

Mandarin must for China's ethnic minorities

BEIJING, 12 MARCH

China's Parliament ended its much-publicised annual session on Thursday, approving a host of laws, including the controversial ethnic law that mandates Mandarin Chinese for all ethnic minorities.

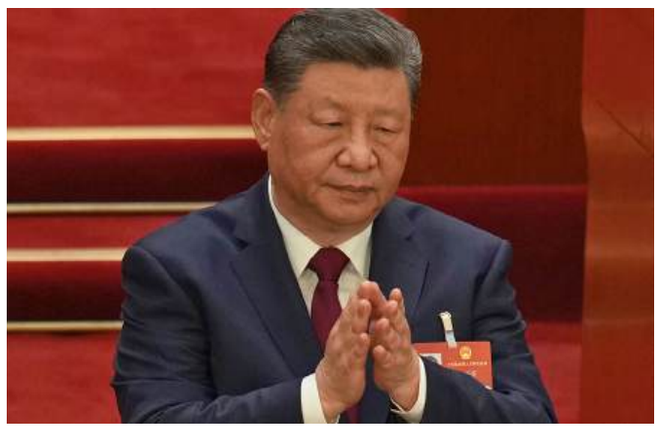
The law also creates a legal base for the Chinese government to prosecute people or organisations outside China if their actions harm the progress of "ethnic unity."

Mandarin is already the primary language of instruction in Inner Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang — Chinese regions with large ethnic minority populations — but the new law essentially states that minority languages cannot be the primary language of instruction nationwide.

Ethnic Uyghurs, a Muslim minority group, have been the target of a long-term campaign of detention and later incarceration by China. While the short-term interment camps were said to be closed in 2019, thousands ended up in prison, where experts have said they were targeted for their identity and not for actual crimes.

Many countries, including the US, pursue similar assimilation policies. China has said its approach is to bring development to ethnic minority areas. But Maya Wang, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch, said the law isn't really about ensuring equality.

The legal penalties for people abroad echo the clause in the National Security Law, which China imposed on Hong Kong in 2020, which states that authorities can prosecute people based outside China over actions that Beijing perceives as secession or subversion. Hong Kong's government later issued bounties for 34 overseas activists on suspicion of violating the security law. *—PTI*



Chinese President Xi Jinping applauds during the National People's Congress (NPC) closing session in Beijing on Thursday —PTI

- The law creates a legal base for the Chinese government to prosecute people or organisations outside China if they harm the progress of "ethnic unity."

Epstein's accountant says he wasn't aware of sex crimes

WASHINGTON, 12 MARCH

Richard Kahn, Jeffrey Epstein's accountant and bookkeeper since 2005, testified on Capitol Hill. Kahn described to US lawmakers how Epstein made millions of dollars while claiming no knowledge of the convicted sex trafficker's abuse. Testifying on Wednesday that he had never seen any of Epstein's victims.

Rep James Walkinshaw (D-Va) said Epstein's sex-trafficking ring would not have been possible without Kahn, who managed Epstein's finances and authorised payments, including to victims.

Kahn and Epstein's then-lawyer, Darren Indyke, are named as executors of his estate. As executors, Indyke and Kahn negotiated compensation packages paid to survivors and included conditions that prevented survivors who accepted funds from taking further legal action against them.

Further, according to the FBI, following Epstein's arrest for child sex trafficking in July 2019, Kahn allegedly ordered staff to ferry the contents of the mansion's safe, including bundles of cash, passports, binders of CDs and hard drives, to his own home. Kahn eventually surrendered the items via his attorney.

Rep James Comer said that Kahn believed Epstein earned his money as a tax adviser and financial planner. *—PTI*

50 killed, 125 missing in Ethiopia landslides

ADDIS ABABA, 12 MARCH

At least 50 people have died and 125 others are missing after landslides hit three districts in south Ethiopia following a week of heavy rains, officials said on Thursday.

The landslides hit the Gamo Zone and affected the Gacho Baba District, Kamba District and Bonke District, according to Gamo Zone Director of disaster response Mesfin Manuqa.

He said that one person was pulled out of the mud alive. The Gacho Baba District communication Chief said most of those who died were found buried in the mud. It is not yet clear how many households were affected. *—PTI*

Gold futures dip to Rs 1.61L/10g amid firm USD

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

Gold futures declined by Rs 38 to Rs 1.61 lakh per 10 grams on Thursday, as rising oil prices increased inflation concerns and lessened the chances of US Federal Reserve interest rate cuts. According to the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), April delivery gold fell by 0.02 per cent, or Rs 38, to Rs 1,61,751 per 10 grams in a business turnover of 1,067 lots. Oil prices climbed for the second consecutive day amid concerns over a prolonged Iran conflict, overshadowing the impact of a coordinated release of oil reserves by major economies. Globally, on the Comex, gold for April delivery decreased USD 6.17, or 0.12 per cent, to USD 5,170.29 per ounce. *—PTI*

Netflix launches fifth global VFX hub in Hyderabad

HYDERABAD, 12 MARCH

Netflix launched its new visual effects and virtual production hub, Eyeline Studios, in Hyderabad. The event was attended by Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, IT Minister Sridhar Babu, and Rana Daggubati. Founded in 2019, Eyeline merged with Scanline VFX in 2025, operating across Studios, VFX, and Labs. The Hyderabad office spans 32,000 sq ft with advanced technology, including LED stages and AI tools. Reddy said, "Hyderabad is a natural home for Netflix," adding, "We will ensure total support." Co-CEO Ted Sarandos highlighted India's role in global storytelling and visual effects, emphasising the sector's growth. Daggubati described Hyderabad as an ideal location, noting its infrastructure and talent support. *—PTI*

Markets lose for 2nd day amid high crude prices

Sensex tanked 829.29 points, while Nifty fell 227,70 points

MUMBAI, 12 MARCH

Benchmark equity indices ended with deep cuts on Thursday, with the Sensex tumbling over 800 points amid a sharp rise in crude oil prices due to the heightening crisis in West Asia. Besides, sluggish global market trends, weakness in the rupee and persistent foreign capital outflows also rattled investor sentiment.

The30-share BSE Sensex tanked 829.29 points, or 1.08 per cent, to settle at 76,034.42. During the day, it plunged 992.53 points or 1.29 per cent to 75,871.18. A total of 2,516 stocks declined, while 1,713 advanced and 175 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Similarly, the 50-share NSE Nifty fell 227.70 points, or 0.95 per cent, to close at 23,639.15. "The market is witnessing broad-based consolidation, although selective buying has emerged in renewables and utility stocks. Sustained risk-off sentiment and ongoing FII outflows are likely to keep both equities and the rupee under pressure," Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Investments Limited, said. However, the premium valuation of India has narrowed during the year, making it highly investable for a long-term investor.

Mahindra & Mahindra was the biggest loser among the Sensex constituents, dropping 4.23 per cent, followed by Maruti, Bajaj Finance, Larsen & Toubro, UltraTech Cement and Trent.

In contrast, NTPC, Power Grid, Tech Mahindra, HCL Tech and Reliance Industries were the winners. The BSE smallcap select index declined 0.65 per cent, and the midcap select index dipped 0.55 per cent.

Meanwhile, retail inflation in the country moved up to 3.21 per cent in February compared to 2.74 per cent in the preceding month, according to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) released on Thursday. *—PTI*

Zomato, Swiggy hit due to LPG crisis, deliveries down

MUMBAI, 12 MARCH

India's food delivery sector is facing a sharp slowdown as the LPG crisis disrupt restaurant operations across several cities. Platforms Zomato and Swiggy have recorded a steep fall in orders as restaurants, cloud kitchens and street food vendors struggle with shortages of commercial LPG cylinders.

Industry sources say many eateries have either reduced operations or temporarily shut down due to limited cooking fuel. As a result, the number of available orders on delivery platforms has shrunk significantly, directly affecting gig workers and platform revenues.

The crisis has also impacted stock market sentiment. On 12 March, shares of Swiggy traded around Rs 282 after dropping to Rs 271 earlier in the day, reflecting heightened volatility. Meanwhile, Zomato, listed as Eternal, fell to roughly Rs 220 amid heavy selling pressure. The stock has corrected nearly 23 per cent from its 52-week high of Rs 368.

The Gig and Platform Service Workers Union warned that the crisis is severely affecting delivery workers' livelihoods. According to the union, food delivery orders have declined by 50–60 per cent as restaurants scale down operations.

In Pune, delivery partner Parshuram Kamble told Indian Express that his daily orders have dropped. "Earlier I completed around 32 orders in a 12-hour shift. Now it is about 13 to 15," he said. His earnings have fallen from Rs 1,600 to nearly Rs 600 a day, threatening the financial stability of his family in Kolhapur. *—PTI*

Retail inflation rises to 3.21% in Feb

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

Retail inflation moved up to 3.21 per cent in February compared to 2.74 per cent in January, driven mainly by higher food prices, showed government data on Thursday. However, the consumer price index (CPI) based retail inflation stayed within the Reserve Bank's target of 2-4 per cent. The government has mandated the central bank to ensure inflation remains at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side.

The February inflation data is based on the new CPI series with base year 2024 released last month.

Food inflation in February rose sequentially to 3.47 per cent from 2.13 per cent in January, showed the data from National Statistics Office (NSO). The major items that witnessed a high pace of price hike were 'silver, gold, diamond, platinum jewellery', coconut-copra, tomato, and cauliflower. However, there was disinflation in garlic, onion, potato, arhar, and litchi. Inflation rates for rural and urban areas were at 3.37 per cent and 3.02 per cent, respectively. *—PTI*

Rupee falls to record low at 92.36

MUMBAI, 12 MARCH

The rupee recovered from record low levels and settled with a loss of 16 paise at 92.17 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday as global crude oil prices stayed on an upward trajectory.

A stronger greenback and volatility in the domestic equity markets further weighed on the rupee, which was already weak due to heavy foreign fund outflows.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 92.25 but kept slipping to touch its record intra-day low against the greenback at 92.36. However, it recovered some of its lost ground and eventually settled at 92.17 (provisional), down 16 paise from its previous close.

The rupee previously recorded its lowest intra-day low of 92.35 against the greenback on 9 March.

"The rupee declined, hitting a record low of 92.36 on weak domestic markets and rising crude oil prices. However, the rupee recovered on supposed intervention by the RBI," Anuj Choudhary, research analyst, Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said.

According to Choudhary, the USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in the range of Rs 91.70 to Rs 92.40. The dollar index was trading 0.15 per cent higher at 99.38 *—PTI*

450 UNITS AFFECTED

Amid war, India's textile hub faces Rs 1,000 cr loss

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

- The West Asia war has begun affecting the textile industry in Bhilwara, with export orders being stalled and trade disruptions impacting shipments worth an estimated Rs 800– Rs 1,000 crore

The West Asia war has begun affecting the textile industry in Bhilwara, with export orders being stalled and trade disruptions impacting shipments worth an estimated Rs 800– Rs 1,000 crore. Often referred to as India's textile hub, Bhilwara hosts a large cluster of manufacturing units and provides employment to thousands across the sector. According to RK Jain, the industry has started experiencing difficulties due to the continuing tensions in the Gulf region.

"Bhilwara is renowned as a textile city. More than 450 fabric units, over 20 spinning units, 21 processing units and more than five denim industries operate here," Jain said. "Around 10 crore metres of cloth are produced every month, and more than two lakh people are directly or indirectly employed in the textile industry."

He added that export activity has already begun to slow. "Textile industries are facing trouble due to the war, and if the situation continues, exports from here could be affected. Currently, export orders are on hold," he said.

Several consignments are either stalled locally or stuck at ports, while some overseas buyers have temporarily paused orders amid uncertainty.

The Gulf region and Europe remain key markets for Bhilwara's textile exports. Yarn produced in the city is shipped to Bangladesh and European countries, while fabric exports are largely directed towards Gulf nations and European markets. Such prolonged disruptions could affect exports and production, says market experts. *—PTI*

NSE appoints 20 merchant bankers, law firms for its IPO

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

The National Stock Exchange of India (NSE) has appointed 20 merchant bankers, along with several law firms and other intermediaries, to manage its initial public offering (IPO).

The development follows the NSE board's decision to proceed with its long-pending public listing. The proposed IPO will consist entirely of an offer-for-sale (OFS) by existing shareholders, with no fresh issue of shares.

The selection of intermediaries was carried out through a "structured, transparent and competitive process" based on an evaluation framework approved by the IPO committee.

The 20 merchant bankers appointed include Kotak Mahindra Capital Company, JM Financial, Axis Capital, IIFL Capital Services, Motilal Oswal Investment Advisors, ICICI Securities, SBI Capital Markets, Nuvama Wealth Management, HDFC Bank, Avendus Capital, Morgan Stanley India Company, Citigroup Global Markets India, J.P. Morgan India, HSBC Securities and Capital Markets (India), IDBI Capital Markets & Securities, 360 ONE WAM, Anand Rathi Advisors, DAM Capital Advisors, Pantomath Capital Advisors and Equirus Capital.

NSE had filed draft offer documents in 2016 to raise about Rs 10,000 crore . Sebi had withheld approval following governance concerns. *—PTI*

LPG scarcity sparks rise in induction sales in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

Retailers across Delhi have reported a sharp spike in the sale of induction cooktops and electric cooking appliances as LPG shortage push homess and eateries to seek alternative cooking options.

Shopkeepers said the surge in demand has been visible for the past two days, with customers increasingly turning to electric cooktops, infrared stoves and compatible utensils as a backup.

Amit Gupta, who owns Effects Kitchens and Hardware, said his store has witnessed a sudden rush of customers and enquiries. The demand has exceeded the shop's existing stock, forcing the store to source additional inventory.

The government has revised the priority order for allocating domestically-produced natural gas, placing LPG production, besides that of CNG and piped cooking gas, at the top.

The demand for compatible utensils has also increased as customers are looking to shift temporarily to electric cooking.

Nearly 70 to 80 per cent of restaurants run on LPG cylinders, with many struggling to obtain supplies. Some have even shut down temporaril-Cylinders are being sold in the black market, but smaller restaurants are using firewood instead. *—PTI*

TECH MAHINDRA DELAYS ONBOARDING OF 1,000 FRESHERS

MUMBAI, 12 MARCH

Tech Mahindra has postponed onboarding more than 1,000 engineering graduates from the 2025 batch across Maharashtra, as the IT major slowed fresh hiring in FY26 to boost operating margins and utilisation amid a challenging macroeconomic environment.

Many graduates, who cleared aptitude tests and interviews in January-February 2025, have yet to receive formal offer letters.

A Pune-based fresher said, "It's nearly a year since we were informed of our selection, but we haven't received offer letters."

Another explained, "All my batchmates have received joining dates, but we are still waiting. The placement cell is focusing on this year's batch."

Prashant Pandit, Secretary at FITE, said, "Once more freshers raise complaints, we will approach the labour ministry."

Responding, a Tech Mahindra spokesperson stated, "We continue rolling out offer letters in batches aligned with business demand. We remain committed to our campus hiring commitments."

Industry-wide delays, including Wipro, TCS, and Infosys, have been linked to demand uncertainty. *—PTI*

Musk hard launches 'Macrohard' to run companies sans humans

BENGALURU, 12 MARCH

Elon Musk unveiled "Macrohard", a joint project between Tesla and his artificial intelligence startup xAI. Musk's Macrohard aims to replace an entire software company where it will write codes, fix bugs, test software and manage projects.

Musk also called it "Digital Optimus", in line with Tesla's humanoid robot project Tesla Optimus.

The name 'Macrohard' comes from Musk taking a dig at Microsoft and shows the project's ambition to digitally replicate software giants. It is part of Tesla's $2 billion investment agreement with xAI.

It is a powered by Grok, xAI's large language model, and an AI agent made by Tesla. Grok would work as its brain and Optimus robots would carry out the physical tasks. Musk says it will run on Tesla's low cost AI4 chip that costs $650 instead of depending on pricey GPUs such as that from Nvidia.

- The West Asia war has begun affecting the textile industry in Bhilwara, with export orders being stalled and trade disruptions impacting shipments worth an estimated Rs 800– Rs 1,000 crore

Musk called Macrohard the "only real-time smart AI system" and added that by this year end, it will achieve "digital human emulation" that lets an AI perform any task a human can on a computer.

The latest product launched by Musk is likely to disrupt companies involved in software development and data processing.*—Salar News*

Aus software firm cuts 10% workforce to focus on AI

BENGALURU, 12 MARCH

Australian enterprise software firm Atlassian on Wednesday announced plans to lay off 10 per cent of its workforce (1,600 employees) as it shifts focus towards artificial intelligence.

Around 16 per cent of the affected employees are in India, 40 per cent in North America, 30 per cent in Australia.

The restructuring is to focus on the future of teamwork in the AI era. Shares rose nearly 2 per cent in extended trading

Chief executive Mike Cannon-Brookes said that while AI would not replace people entirely, it would change the mix of skills and roles required.

Atlassian generates most of its revenue from collaboration tools. *—Salar News*

LIMITED TO CALLS, MESSAGES

WhatsApp offers parent-run accounts

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

Meta-owned WhatsApp has announced new parent-managed accounts for children below 13 years of age, giving parents full control over who can contact them on WhatsApp and which groups they are allowed to join.

The latest parental controls are designed to limit the WhatsApp experience of children to messaging and calling, the company said. The parents will be able to review message requests from unknown contacts and manage the account's privacy settings.

The under-13 users will not be able to access and change privacy settings. These controls and settings can only be accessed after entering a PIN on the managed device.

In order to set up these accounts, the user has to be under 13 years of age or the minimum age required in a country to use the platform. These accounts will be rolled out on devices that have the latest version of WhatsApp for iPhone or Android.

The announcement comes as governments move to restrict children's access to social media in response to growing concerns over social media addiction and online safety of minors.

The central government is considering a more nuanced and graded approach in specifying restrictions for social media access of under-18 children instead of a total ban.

Meta has warned that blanket bans could have unintended consequences and advocated for parental oversight as a more effective approach to managing teenagers' digital activity.

In February 2025, Meta rolled out Instagram Teen Accounts in India with a similar approach focused on enhanced privacy and parental controls. Accounts created by any Instagram user between the ages of 13 and 18 teen accounts. *—PTI*

-PTI

Gill set to be named Cricketer of Year at BCCI annual gala

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

India's Test and ODI captain Shubman Gill is set to be named Cricketer of the Year at the BCCI's annual awards to be held here on 15 March. The 26-year-old, who was not picked in the T20 side that defended the World Cup crown last month, enjoyed a stellar run in the other two formats. He amassed 983 runs in Tests, including a whopping 754 in the drawn away series against England in 2025, at an average of over 70. His ODI runs tally stood at 490, including 188 runs during India's title-winning Champions Trophy campaign. Overall, Gill accumulated 1,764 runs across formats at an average of 49, dotted with seven centuries and three fifties.—*PTI*

Messi stuck on 899 goals after 0-0 Inter Miami draw

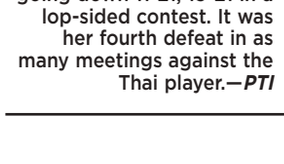
NASHVILLE, 12 MARCH

Lionel Messi was denied his 900th career goal on Wednesday as reigning MLS champion Inter Miami played a 0-0 draw at Nashville in the CONCACAF Champions Cup. The 38-year-old Argentine superstar striker was tightly marked throughout the match, a first-leg showdown in the round of 16 in the North American club showdown. Inter Miami will host the second leg next Wednesday. Messi moved within one goal of the milestone 900th career tally after netting his 80th goal for Miami, and 899th of his career, last Saturday in an MLS triumph over DC United. His scoring opportunity came in the 55th minute as he came streaking down the left side and got off a shot that was saved by Nashville goalkeeper Bruan—*PTI*

Final batch of SA, WI players leave India

DUBAI, 12 MARCH

The last batch of South African and West Indian players stranded in India after the T20 World Cup have departed, the ICC announced on Thursday, ending a crisis caused by the closure of Gulf air space in the wake of the raging West Asia conflict. The ongoing war threw travel plans into disarray, leaving the South African and West Indies teams stranded in Kolkata due to the closure of airspace and airports at major transit points like Dubai. The West Indies and South Africa played their final T20 World Cup matches in Kolkata on 1 March and 4 March, respectively.—*PTI*


-PTI

Mannepalli enters second round of Swiss Open

BASEL, 12 MARCH

Indian shuttler Tharun Mannepalli advanced to the men's singles second round after his opponent, Kenta Nishimoto of Japan, retired in the decider at the Swiss Open here. Mannepalli, ranked 43rd in the world, was leading 16-21 21-16 7-2 when the fifth-seeded Nishimoto retired from the round of 32 match on Wednesday night due to a shoulder issue. The 24-year-old, who had reached the semifinals of the Macau Open last year, will next face Malaysia's Justin Hoh. In women's singles, Malvika Bansod failed to get past Thailand's world No. 4 Pornpawee Chochuwong, going down 11-21, 15-21 in a lop-sided contest. It was her fourth defeat in as many meetings against the Thai player.—*PTI*

India now eye title triumph in Women's WC Qualifiers

Indian women's hockey team finished on top of Pool B

HYDERABAD, 12 MARCH

Already assured of a World Cup berth, India would aim for the winners' trophy at the FIH Women's Hockey World Cup Qualifiers and take a step forward in that direction by winning the semifinal against Italy here on Friday.

The Indian women's hockey team finished on top of Pool B with seven points from three matches. Scotland also collected the same points but finished second in the group because of India's superior goal difference.

The hosts registered two wins and one draw in the pool stage.

Italy finished second in Pool A with four points after registering one win, one draw, and one loss, giving the hosts a slight psychological edge ahead of the semifinal.

India will look to build on the impressive form of forward Navneet Kaur, who is currently the joint top-scorer of the tournament with four goals. She produced a standout performance in the final pool match against Wales, scoring a brilliant hat-trick to cap off the group stage in style.

Italy, meanwhile, will rely on Federica Carta, who has been its key attacking threat and has scored three goals so far in the competition.

On paper and form, India holds a major advantage over Italy.

In terms of head-to-head encounters, India and Italy have faced each other seven times since 2012. India has won five of those matches, while Italy has registered one victory and one game ended in a draw, giving the hosts a slight psychological edge.

India's chief coach Sjoerd Marijne, who is back at the helm after the Tokyo Olympics, termed the achievement a significant milestone.

"Securing qualification for the FIH Hockey Women's World Cup 2026 is an important milestone for this group, and the players deserve a lot of credit for the way they have performed so far in the tournament," he said.

"They have shown good discipline, composure, and attacking intent throughout the pool stage.

"At the same time, our mindset is very clear, we are not here just to qualify. We want to keep improving with every match and aim to win the tournament. The semifinal is another big challenge, and we will approach it with full focus and intensity."

The Dutchman, however, cautioned his wards to take Italy lightly.

Italy is a competitive side, and they have shown in this tournament that they can trouble strong teams. For us, the focus will be on executing our plans well, maintaining our structure, and continuing to play with the same energy and confidence," he said.

The FIH Women's World Cup will be played alongside the men's competition to be jointly hosted by the Netherlands and Belgium from 15 to 30 August. —*PTI*

INDIAN GOLF PREMIER LEAGUE

IGPL and LIV Golf-backed International Series officials -PTI

IGPL unveils pathway for Indian golfers to access global events

SINGAPORE, 12 MARCH

The LIV Golf-backed International Series and the Indian Golf Premier League (IGPL) on Thursday announced a partnership to create a performance pathway for Indian players to compete on the global stage.

Leading IGPL players will gain access to various International Series events and also get opportunities to compete at LIV Golf Promotions, accelerating their progression into elite-level golf.

The collaboration was formalised at Aramco LIV Golf Singapore, where leaders from both organisations confirmed their shared ambition to strengthen the developmental pathway for emerging talent. "This kind of an opportunity is a game changer for Indian golfing talent, and we are happy to extend our platform to such incredible opportunities," IGPL CEO Uttam Singh Mundy said in a release.

Through the partnership, IGPL's leading players, determined by the league's rankings at agreed points during the season, will earn places in various International Series events across the calendar.

"India is a market with huge potential for the sport, and aligning IGPL with LIV Golf and The International Series helps create a clearer ladder for talented players to test themselves internationally, progress their careers through these pathways, and inspire India's next generation of golf stars," Scott O'Neil, CEO of LIV Golf, said.

The franchise-based league featured 11 tournaments in its inaugural 2025–26 tour. The second edition kicked off in Chandigarh on Wednesday.

Competing in the International Series will give these players the chance to test themselves on world-class courses against elite fields and offer a higher level of competition. —*PTI*

Hungary visa applications with forged WFI letter raise trafficking fears

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

A suspected human trafficking attempt has come to light after individuals posing as Indian wrestlers sought visas from the Hungarian Embassy in New Delhi for a purported competition in Budapest, prompting the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) to clarify that the documents submitted by them were fake.

The embassy sought verification from WFI on Thursday after receiving visa applications supported by a recommendation letter allegedly issued by the national federation on March 4 for participation in an "international wrestling training and competition programme" scheduled in Budapest from March 15 to 22. The WFI swiftly responded and said that the letter was forged and had not been issued by the federation.

"This has reference to your e-mail dated March 12 seeking clarification regarding the authenticity of the document... the attached letter is fake and has not been issued by the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI)," WFI president Sanjay Kumar Singh said in a reply to the embassy.

The federation also pointed out discrepancies in the document, including the use of the name of a former office-bearer in an incorrect capacity.

"It is also clarified that Mr. V.N. Prasood is no longer holding the position of Secretary General of WFI and is currently serving as Vice President, WFI. The matter has been verified with Mr. Prasood, who has categorically denied issuing any such letter," Singh said.

According to the forged letter submitted to the embassy, 11 wrestlers and a manager were recommended for visas to travel to Budapest, citing a training and competition programme at a local venue. —*PTI*

Gunjan wins at World Boxing Futures Cup

BANGKOK, 12 MARCH

Gunjan, Radhamani Longjam, and Chandrika Pujari registered victories in their respective bouts as the Indian Youth boxing team recorded a series of strong performances on the fifth day of the World Boxing Futures Cup here on Thursday.

In the morning session, Gunjan (48kg) secured a convincing 5-0 unanimous decision victory over Poland.

Radhamani Longjam (57kg) delivered a dominant display, defeating her opponent from Ecuador by Referee Stopped Contest (RSC) in the first round.

However, Prachi (60kg) went down 5-0 to a Slovakian rival, while Priyansh Sehrawat (70kg) suffered a 5-0 defeat against a Moroccan boxer in the men's division.

Later in the evening session, Chandrika Pujari (50kg) added another win to India's tally with a 5-0 unanimous decision victory over the United States pugilist. —*PTI*

DIKSHA TIED AT 24TH IN AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S OPEN

ADELAIDE, 12 MARCH

Diksha Dagar and Vani Kapoor were off to good starts with an even par 72 each that placed them Tied-24th after the first round of the Women's Australian Open here on Thursday.

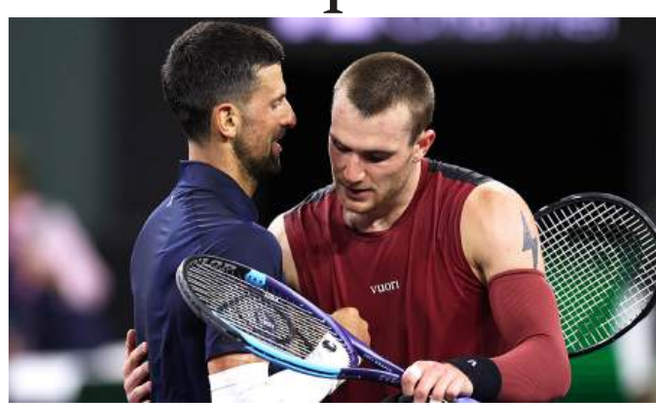
It was a rather disappointing day for Hitaashee Bakshi (77) and Avani Prashanth (77), who were Tied-98 and needed a very low second round to make the 36-hole cut, while Pranavi Urs (78) was even further down.

Darcey Harry and Alexandra Forsterling matched one another's low scoring agenda at the Women's Australian Open, carding rounds of 66 (-6) and 67 (-5) respectively to sit first and second on the leaderboard. —*PTI*

INDIAN WELLS

Jack Draper stuns Djokovic; Alcaraz reaches quarters

INDIAN WELLS, 12 MARCH



World No. 14 Jack Draper produced one of the biggest results of the Indian Wells Open after defeating Serbian legend and World No. 3 Novak Djokovic in a thrilling Round 16 contest, while several top seeds progressed further in the prestigious ATP Masters 1000 tournament.

Draper battled past Djokovic 4-6, 6-4, 7-6(5) in a hard-fought encounter at Indian Wells Tennis Garden in California, surviving a tense deciding-set tie-break to seal a memorable victory. Draper showed composure under pressure against the 24-time Grand Slam champion, rallying after losing the opening set and eventually edging the Serbian in a gripping decider.

Meanwhile, World No. 1 Carlos Alcaraz continued his fine form as the Spaniard advanced to the quarter-finals after defeating Casper Ruud 6-1, 7-6(2) in straight sets on Thursday.

Earlier, Jannik Sinner secured a hard-fought win against Joao Fonseca to advance to his third quarter-final in Indian Wells. In a 7-6(6), 7-6(4) victory, Sinner was pushed to his limits before the Italian ultimately clinched the win with a late surge in the second-set tie-break.

Bhambri enters maiden ATP Masters 1000 semifinal

India's Yuki Bhambri entered his maiden ATP Masters 1000 semifinal as he and his Swedish partner Andre Goransson defeated Alexander Erler and Andrea Vavassori in straight sets in Indian Wells here.

The 33-year-old Indian had previously reached the doubles quarter-finals at the Masters 1000 level twice, including at Indian Wells last year.

Bhambri and Goransson defeated the Austrian-Italian pair 6-3, 7-6 in the quarterfinals that lasted over one hour and 30 minutes.

The Indo-Swedish duo dominated on their first serve, winning 83 per cent of the points (29/35), which proved crucial in taking the second-set tie-break and closing out the match.

Iga routs Karolina to reach quarterfinals

World number two Iga Swiatek cruised to a 6-2, 6-0 victory over Czech 13th seed Karolina Muchova in the Indian Wells fourth round on Wednesday, producing a dominant display in the California desert.

It was one-way traffic as the Pole reeled off 10 consecutive games to secure her fifth win over Muchova, whom she also defeated at the same stage of the tournament last year.

"I felt I was playing better and better, just great," Swiatek said in her on-court interview."I love playing here, I love the conditions. —*PTI*

WANT TO BE IN THE THICK OF THINGS

Always wanted to do a tough job: Bumrah

AHMEDABAD, 12 MARCH

India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah said he relishes taking responsibility in pressure situations and described the T20 World Cup defence as one of the most fulfilling of his career.

Bumrah played a stellar role, claiming four wickets as India handed New Zealand a crushing 96-run defeat in the final to become the only team to win the T20 World Cup three times.

"I don't want to hide behind, I want to be in the thick of things. I always wanted to do a tough job," Bumrah, who was adjudged the Player of the match, said in a video shared by BCCI after the victory.

"I've played cricket for that. I started cricket for that. When I'm able to make a difference, that gives me so much joy. No better feeling than that." For the Gujarat-born pacer, the triumph carried added emotional significance as it came at the venue where his cricket journey began. "I started my cricket here. I played all my cricket here, came up the ranks through playing for Gujarat over here and winning the World Cup here, winning, being Man of the Match. The last time we fell just short, this time we went over it, really happy." Bumrah also spoke about the presence of his family during the title triumph, calling the moment deeply personal.

"My son came. He was there last time as well; this time, he was there. My mum came, really special.

"I don't know about full circles, but really, really happy, back-to-back World Cups never really happen. Really grateful God is really kind, and I couldn't be more thankful." —*PTI*

Max jokes new cars are 'more like Mario Kart'

BERLIN, 12 MARCH

Four-time world champion Max Verstappen said on Thursday he was not having much fun driving the new era of Formula One cars, joking he was "practising with Mario Kart" because it was more realistic than his simulator.

The Red Bull driver crashed in qualifying in the season-opener in Australia last weekend before having to carve his way from 20th on the grid to finish a creditable sixth.

The new cars require battery management and energy harvesting with a 50-50 split between conventional and electrical power.

They also have features such as straight-line mode, active aero, overtake and boost buttons, which Verstappen reckons are nearer to a video game. "I swapped the simulator for my Nintendo Switch. I'm practising with Mario Kart, actually. Finding the mushrooms is going quite well, the blue shells are a bit more difficult," he said.

Verstappen announced this week that he would be driving in the Nurburgring 24-hour race this year. —*PTI*